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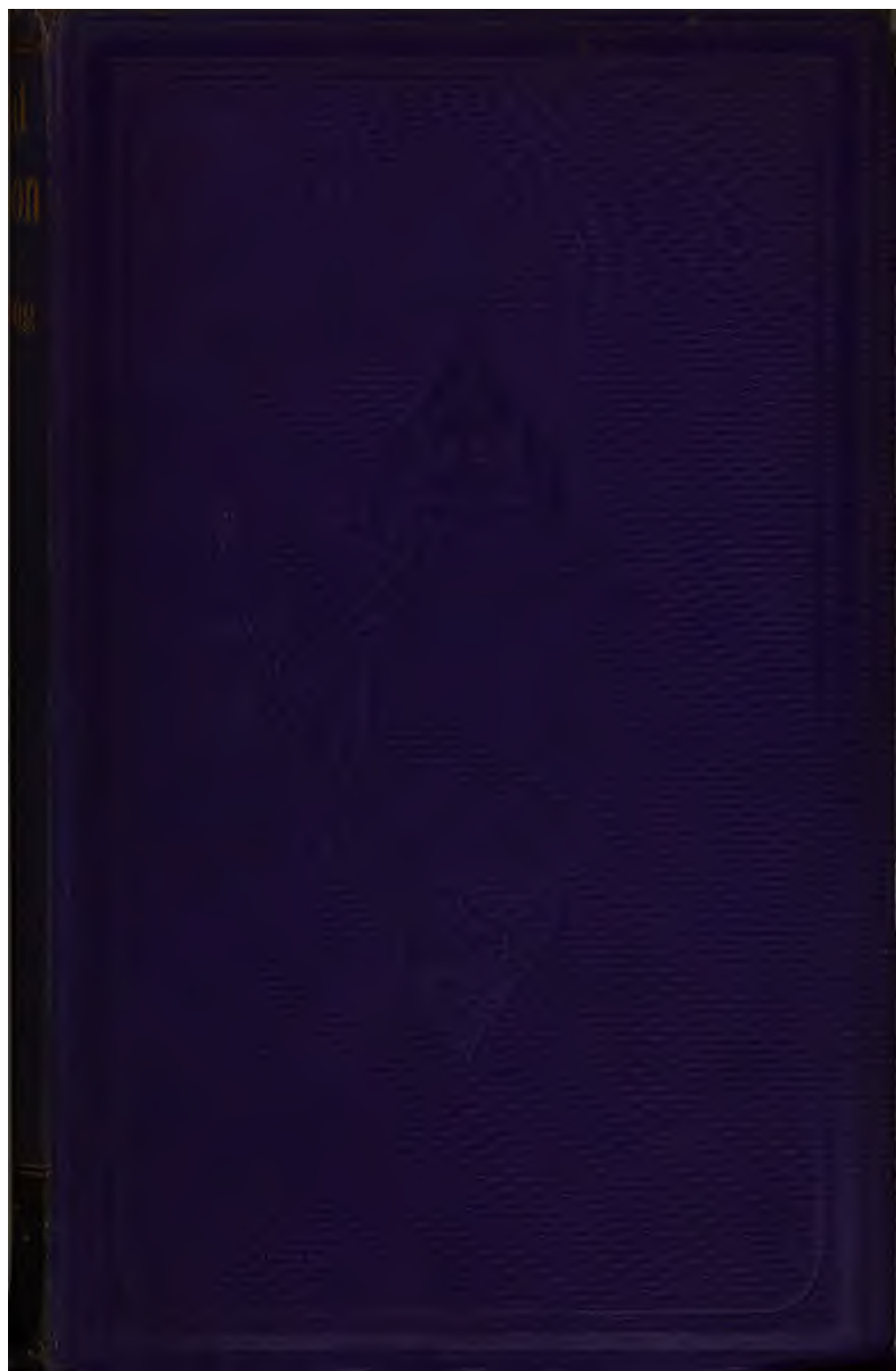
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# A GREAT SENSATION.

BY

EDWARD HENEAGE DERING,

AUTHOR OF "LESTERLINER."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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NEW-STREET SQUARE



TO

MY WIFE

GEORGIANA, LADY CHATTERTON,

I Dedicate

THE FOLLOWING PAGES.





# A GREAT SENSATION.

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## CHAPTER I.

SCENE: The front of an hotel in a Cathedral town. Time, 4.30 a.m.

Distant roll of carriages — one of which enters the archway, and unloads itself of two ladies and a gentleman, all three ball-dressed; whilst another, similarly freighted, disappears countrywards. Ball-dressed male pedestrians are seen coming down the street; two or three of them enter the archway, across which grill-bearing waiters are flitting; another, having in his hand a bouquet which he had obtained, after much hard begging, from one of the tenants of

the carriage now rolling down the street, bestows it on a "social evil," for the amusement and instruction of the ostler.

Two more men, fresh from the ball-room, came up as this last-named occurrence took place : one was about twenty-five years of age—a couple of inches above the middle height, with classical features, clearly rather than strongly chiselled, and a figure indicating by its form rather than evidencing by its movements a fair amount of physical vigour : the other was nearly a lustre older, and three inches taller, with an uneasy, half-defiant manner of standing, such as often causes the imagination of waltz-partners to fill up a space, more or less wide, to the credit of athleticism ; and his features owned that kind of pseudo-beauty which is born of strong but in-harmonious contrasts of feature and colouring. The countenance of each betokened firmness of purpose—the one cultivated,

the other instinctive ; the one progressive and convinced, the other spasmodic and self-sceptical. The details of their respective careers, as far as they had run, evidenced, to some extent, the distinctive nature of each ; the one representing noiseless development, the other showy retrogression ; the one unpretentiously exceeding expectation, the other plausibly disappointing it.

Nevertheless, the latter impressed his own individuality wider, if not deeper, than the former ; because what is conventionally called the world (to wit, the chattering, unreflecting members of it) understood, or thought they understood him better.

“ Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst.”

Invert the verbs in the above, and the result gives the mean depth of character-reading ; as most of us would be forced to

acknowledge if cross-examined *in foro conscientie*.

The apparent character of the individual in question was doubly attractive to surface-searchers; viz. in virtue of its resemblance to their own, and in virtue of a certain kind of pseudo-mystery, such as is provocative of small hero-worship in the drawing-rooms of country-houses before luncheon. Whether the words real and apparent would, or would not, be practically identical terms in this case, the reader will determine previous to closing the third volume; that is, if he or she "read fair," and do not *skip* the pages. I add the word 'pages' because I wish to guard against an *équivoque* — remembering the story of Dr. Abernethy, who, instead of a prescription, gave a certain lady the shilling out of his fee, with directions to buy a skipping rope with it; therefore, I define my meaning, since our poor language cannot boast of

the "logique inexorable du Français;" nor, indeed, can it be expected to be in as good training as the French, wherein each word, being accustomed to serve alternately in every style of speaking and writing, knows its place.

As before stated, the two ball-dressed men, whose distinctive qualities have caused this narrative to halt on its march, neared the archway of the hotel just in time to witness the fate of the bouquet—to see the flowers, yet warm from the throbbing touch of a pure, trustful girl of eighteen, tossed about by three wretched representatives of womanhood in its lowest depth of degradation, and belaboured in a gin-voice of ribaldry.

" 'What Cato did and Addison approved cannot be wrong,' " said the elder of the two ball-dressed pedestrians aforementioned, turning a pair of keen dark eyes with a look of unreal carelessness, from the saturnalia

in the street to the spectators in the inn yard. "Look at that young cad a-heddicaating hisself, and learning to reason from analogy. I'll swear, by the look of him, he's the son of the ostler who stands there grinning at the proceedings."

His companion said nothing, but made a rapid gesture, which caused as rapid a movement on the part of both cad and ostler, who disappeared into the far interior of the inn yard, bawling with all their might.

"Mr. Ernsford's dog-cart out."

"A man is never so quick in taking an order as when he is neglecting his regular work:" continued the elder ball-dressed pedestrian, with a smile of unenjoying humour.

"That's thrue for ye thin, bedad:" said an Irishman in search of work, who was passing by with a bundle hanging from his shouldered shillelah. "Will I be taking

the reg'lar work for yer honour? Sure, it's proud I'd be."

He passed on whistling " St. Patrick's Day ;" but the empty tobacco-box, out of which the poor fellow was with difficulty scraping enough tobacco for half a pipeful to warm his breakfastless stomach, was a sight too touchingly antithetical to admit of doubt hanging upon the skirts of impulse. How different soever the characters and careers of the two ball-dressed pedestrians might be, the hand of each dived into his pocket co-instantly, and each pulled out half-a-crown.

A luminous atmosphere, just visible in the eastern horizon, dimly foreheralded the sunrise. Poor Pat had passed on his way light-heartedly: the blackguard who had erewhile assigned an innocent girl's bouquet to contact only less polluting than his own, was fuelling his animalism with broiled bones and anchovy toast: the yell



of ribald laughter, and the heavy roll of family coaches were hushed by distance.

"Mr. Ernsford's dog-cart is ready:" said the ostler from the door-step to what is called, in domestic *argot*, an odd boy, who was acting on that busy night the part of a repeating frigate between the stable-yard and the hotel. A minute later the quondam ball-dressed pedestrians appeared.

"I never saw such an infernal room in my life," said the elder. "The fact is, I didn't know till three days ago that I should be able to come to Perringston; so that I couldn't order a bedroom here till they were all taken; and I believe the landlord has given me his own room, with the sheets he has been sleeping on for the last six months."

"You had much better sleep at Ernsford:" suggested the other remedially. "I'll drive you to Perringston to-morrow morning, before Lady Rossden gets there ;

or I can bring you here in time to drive back with her if you like. I am only six miles from here, and ten from Perrington. By the bye, they are going on their way home to luncheon at Moorfield, which is only three miles from my house : you can join them there."

" Well, really, I should like it very much. But won't it give a great deal of trouble?"

" Not the least ; there's my brother's room ready at once : I expect him tomorrow or next day."

The final result of the dialogue was, that within ten minutes the dog-cart issued forth from the yard, conveying three people and a portmanteau.

" What's his name with the valet as has drove off with Squire Ernsford, and come with Lady Rossden ?" asked the ostler of the odd boy.

" Sir John Campion, I think, which I

see his name on the portmanteau as I helped put into the cart," replied the odd boy.

The ostler pushed up the front of his cap, and dexterously reshook it into its former position, but could make nothing of the information.

"Never heard talk of him."

Neither had the odd boy.

## CHAPTER II.

## POST-FESTAL RETROSPECTIONS AND COMMENTARIES.

DIALOGUE between the hero of the bouquet and his friend, a "good-fellow," unknown to fame, but not to defame—women. [N.B.—Suggestively, perhaps, of the proper relation between them and society, their patronymics have not been handed down to us; an omission which necessitates the arithmetical system of denomination as practised in Siberia.]

*No. 1.* (With self-appreciative candour.)  
 "Yes, she's a jolly little girl, and all that; very well to draw her out, and all that sort of thing—but her sister's a

slapping fine woman — Mrs. What's-her-name."

*No. 2.* "Did you see her with the Caterpillar?"

*No. 1.* "In the cloak room? But you don't suppose . . ."

*No. 2.* "Hem!"

Notice to the unsophisticated. *No. 2* did not mean to imply that the lady in question had been engaged in entomological studies, but in an absorbing flirtation with a young gentleman enjoying the above sobriquet. I say enjoying, because I have always observed that typical nicknames generally indicate social popularity, and the privilege of contracting debts at the expense of fathers and elder brothers. Respecting the relation between the nickname in question and its bearer, there are two plausible theories: first, his insinuating manners, as symbolised in the sinuous motion of a caterpillar (this derivation we

owe to his mother); secondly, the ease with which men of his stamp throw off the traces of their bachelor-life, soaring upward in a new character, and with additional liberty.

Second notice to the unsophisticated. From No. 2's self-commitless mode of personifying the creations of his own gross mind, it does not in the least follow that the "slapping fine woman" regarded the Caterpillar in any other light than as a machine for the intercommunication of country gossip—

As will appear from the conversation that passed between her and her sister, the jolly little girl and ex-possessor of the bouquet before mentioned, as they drove home in the carriage which was rolling countrywards when the two ball-dressed pedestrians arrived at the archway of the hotel.

*Father of the above-named ladies.* "Well,

I think that fellow, the Caterpillar, as they call him, is monstrous conceited and effeminate looking. In my time they would not have stood such an ass."

*Slapping fine woman* (with an apathetic yawn). "Yes, the only use of him is that he saves me the trouble of finding conversation, and tells me all the county news. But that friend of his . . . ."

*Jolly little girl* (deprecatingly). "He dances very well—I'm sure I don't know any harm\* in him. He made himself very agreeable."

*Slapping fine woman* (patronisingly). "Why, child, you've never seen anybody yet."

*Jolly little girl* (throwing a shawl over the space where her bouquet ought to have

\* Notice to sisterless bachelors and foreigners: The word *harm* must here be taken in a modified sense, signifying, generally, such attributes as vulgarity, dulness, conceit, impertinence, inadmissible parents, &c. &c.

been). "Well, I couldn't help it, if he *would* ask me three times just when I wasn't engaged."

*Father of the above.* "I call Miss *Grahame* a fine girl. By the bye, who were those two men that came with Lady Rossden?"

Which question is best answered in the following extracts from a letter written by the said Miss *Grahame* to her friend, Miss —, who was obliged to stay away from the ball because the "measles were in the house."

. . . . "Oh, yes! now I'm going to have a nice long chat, and tell you all about my first ball. I enjoyed it very much, indeed, and I am sure mamma ought to be satisfied. To tell you the truth, I was a little frightened at first, for mamma and Miss Donaldson\* had given me so many cautions that I hardly knew where I was; and Lord Ravensdale, whose perfections

\* The governess.



and fortune, and castles, mamma and Miss Donaldson said so much of, that they quite set me against him, was so kind and amusing, and I laughed at his stories much more than I should have done before them\*; and when the first dance was over, and we threaded our way through the crowd to where mamma was, quite at the other end of the room, I was not at all afraid that so many strange faces were looking at me; and the thought would creep in that it *was* a pleasant thing, as Miss Donaldson says, to be a beauty and an heiress; though I can't help thinking that if it were not for my being an heiress, people would not say so much about the beauty. And I overheard Lady Rossden talking about me and Lord Ravensdale, but it was all nonsense: for you know I like my cousin, Edgar Ernsford, and always shall, and I am not at all

\* i.e. Mrs. Grahame and the governess — not the jokes.—Ed.

worldly, and I much prefer dear Edgar with 2000*l.* a year, to the other with 40,000*l.*, and Ravensdale House, in London, and —, in —shire; and when he asked me for the third time I could not help showing a little hauteur. My next partner was Sir John Campion, the most fashionable man in London, and they say he scarcely ever condescends to notice young ladies at all; and he's a great deal too fine to dance, and he took as much pains to amuse me as Lord Ravensdale, and he's much cleverer and more agreeable. You cannot think how attractive it is to see the contemptuous sort of indifference with which he looked upon the brilliant ball, and his satirical remarks on some of the people there. But I'm sure he must be very wicked, and so every one says. So I can't like him; but he was so agreeable I could not help being glad when he asked me to dance the next waltz, after walking

about instead of taking me back to mamma. And afterwards Lord Ravensdale asked me; but I was not quite sure whether it was right to dance so often with the same person; and just as we were beginning I passed Edgar, and I felt annoyed, as I had not seen him till then since he came in; and I thought he looked depressed, too, though I have no reason to suppose that he cares about me; but I could not help disengaging my arm from Lord Ravensdale's, and saying that I had been looking for him, which was not strictly true, only I felt so anxious about it that I really thought I had at the moment. He hesitated, and said, 'If you are disengaged for the next, and not tired—'

" 'Oh, no!' I answered, 'I am so glad I am not.' Then I thought I was rude to Lord Ravensdale, so I muttered something about Edgar being my cousin, and my not having danced with him all the evening,

and he \* answered (as I thought) rather sneeringly, and I hated him for it, and thought how superior Edgar was to him. But after all, mamma came up while Edgar was gone to see what the next dance was to be, and reminded me that I was engaged to Lord Sevenoaks, and I had no opportunity of explaining, and I saw him † afterwards dancing with Lady Mary Perringston, whom Miss Donaldson always throws ‡ at me as a model (but I think her detestable). And Edgar never came near me any more all the evening; so provoking!" &c. &c.

Which sentiment Miss Grahame had already expressed in the following dialogue, whilst driving home from the ball.

*Mrs. Grahame* (sitting lightly, and leaning forward). "Well, my darling child, and how have you enjoyed your evening?

\* Lord Ravensdale.—Ed.

† Mr. Ernsford.—Ed.

‡ Metaphorical.—Ed.

I should think you must be quite tired.”  
(*Aside to Mr. Grahame.*) “Never saw a girl admired so much.”

*Miss Grahame* (indirectly, and pulling at the string of her opera cloak). “So provoking that Edgar never came again . . .”

Mrs. Grahame hastily regained the perpendicular, impressing the carriage cushions, if not her daughter, who continued to pull at the string of her opera cloak, and seemed to be what is called working herself up.

*Miss Grahame* (in an anticipatory tone of voice). “So very strange of him not to come . . .”

The lace of Mrs. Grahame’s dress burst.

*Mrs. Grahame.* “Not at all strange. Why should you dance with your cousin. Why, he has been always like a brother to you. Of course he would not interfere now, and take you from all the people who were dying to be introduced to you. I am very glad that he had the good sense and pro-

priety to keep out of the way; for he can dance with you every evening at home if he likes."

*Mr. Grahame* (interposingly). "Well, you see he lives so near, and we've always been—been so intimate, and we all like him so much; but the fact is, he's—he's not so *very* nearly related. I think his grandmother's great uncle and my grandmother were brother and sister."

The buttons of Mrs. Grahame's petticoat flew.\*

*Mrs. Grahame* (in a hurried, guttural whisper, *aside*). "Really, I *do* think this is not the proper place—if you like to take the responsibility, well and good; . . . . but really, after the very particular attention that Lord Ravensdale and the finest gentleman in London, too, Sir John Cam-pion . . . . ."

\* Term of dress-making.—Ed.

## CHAPTER III.

WHO was meanwhile on his way to Ernsford Court, in company with the squire thereof.

The luminous atmosphere that bepinked the eastern horizon when Ernsford ordered his dog-cart, had now deepened into rosy red; and the frost-mist was beginning to sweep slowly westward before a light, clear breeze.

The wheels of the dog-cart ran easily over a hard pale-coloured road, innocent of mud or dust: a long-toothed dark chestnut mare, three parts bred, with forelegs that had seen better days, kept a steady pull at a ring snaffle: the hoof sounds vibrated

with a sharp clanging echo half a mile forward.

As they cleared the town, the following laconic dialogue took place:

*Sir John Campion.* "I'm not particular to a shade; but really the way that man bestowed the girl's bouquet . . . ."

A pause of ten minutes.

*Squire Ernsford.* "Beast!"

*Sir John Campion.* "Ass!"

When two people are journeying together, it often happens that a question just touched upon remains apparently quiescent for a certain time, to burst forth unexpectedly and explanatorily, like an eruptive disorder. And thus it happened with this dialogue of ominous and somewhat misconstructible beginning; for they had not proceeded half a mile farther when it recommenced as follows:

*Sir John* (in a voice of self-encouraging dogmatism). "It's no business of any-



body's what a man's private life is. . . ."  
(Ernsford made no sign) "but to go and make such an exhibition as that, just as Lady RosSDen's carriage drove up to the door. . . . If one of them happened to look out of the window, she *must* have seen it. Who is he?"

*Ernsford.* "I don't know; he doesn't belong to this county."

*Sir John.* "And who's the *grosse blonde* with the chubby little girl whose bouquet it was (for I overheard him ask her for it)?"

*Ernsford.* "I don't know: they came from the other side of the county."

*Sir John.* "Whoever they are, I'm certain that they're not securely seated in their neighbourhood, because every time I passed her (which was at least twenty times) she was listening to some county gossip or other, with a kind of anxious avidity, rather than enjoyment; in fact, getting up the trash

and localisms, as an initiatory probation. It's a great privilege to know, even at second hand, the salient points of ungracefulness in the owner of an exclusive house. The *grosse blonde* might say, with Victor Hugo: 'C'est déjà pour nous une chose très curieuse qu'une muraille derrière laquelle il se passe quelque chose.' But that process is now abandoned to poor distant relations of big-wigs — the *grosse blonde* may buy an exemption."

*Ernsford* (with a mock expression of statistical correctness). "On reflection, I think she's married to an ensign in a marching regiment, under orders for India."

*Sir John* (in the full conviction of having the monopoly of satire within the boundaries of the dog-cart). "I've seen that sort of thing more than once.

"J'ai su depuis qui payait sa toilette.

Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans!"

*Ernsford* (with a serio-comic expression

of countenance). "The interior economy of an English public school certainly leaves a permanent impression on every mind, great or small. They say that Steele never quite got over the feeling that he was still Addison's fag. Now I have not met you since I had the honour of serving you in that capacity—when, by the bye, you were an excellent master to me, and a most exemplary boy on your own account.

Ἐνθα Κύρος αἰδημονέστατος μὲν πρῶτον τῶν ἡλικῶν  
ἐδοκεῖ εἶναι,—

which description, I hope, is still applicable to you! and that accounts for my being a silent member till you maligned two ideal characters for the purpose of quoting from Béranger."

*Sir John* (suddenly awaking to the conviction that he was not having it all his own way). "I can only say:

Πολύ γέ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, νῦν ἀτοπώτερος φαίνη,  
ἐπειδὴ ἔρξω λέγειν, ἢ ὅτε σιγῶν εἶπον.

You speak like a book, my dear fellow; but what ideal characters have I maligned?"

*Ernsford.* "The ensign's wife and the mythical Anglo-Indian, 'qui payait sa toilette.' I say imaginary, because I really don't know who the '*grosse blonde*' is, or her husband either. But without particularising individuals, I maintain that, with all your knowledge of the world, your social philosophy is too *pessimistic*."

*Sir John.* "Or yours too optimistic? 'Cuilibet in sua arte credendum est,' is an old law maxim. If I don't know the world, what *do* I know?"

*Ernsford.* "Those things in which your judgment has not been warped by too immediate contact. In the world (conventionally so called) you have been so uninteruptedly an actor, that you have never had an opportunity of being a spectator. But if it comes to chaffing in law-latin—if I am not mistaken, Lord Coke says that

‘Nihil quod est inconveniens est licitum.’  
I think the argumentum ab inconvenienti  
may be brought against you—your social  
philosophy won’t work well.”

*Sir John.* “I find it answer my purpose  
very practically.”

*Ernsford.* “Like anything else with a  
rotten foundation—for a certain time.”

*Sir John.* “But talking of foundations  
—what sort of foundation have you for  
your reading of it? From a line of Bé-  
ranger’s you, in sober earnest, assume as  
much of my social philosophy (as you call  
it) . . . .”

*Ernsford.* “I apologise for the indeco-  
rum of using only two words when there  
was plenty of room for eight. I meant to  
say—opinions relative to the philosophy of  
social life.”

*Sir John* (holding on to his catchword  
during the interruption). “As I did, in  
fun, of the *grosse blonde*.”

*Ernsford.* "You wish to know the foundation of my conjectures on the subject of the opinions held by yourself relative to the philosophy of social life?"

*Sir John.* "Peccavi! I accept the social philosophy; go on!"

*Ernsford.* "You answered your own question, by saying that I founded them on your quotation from Béranger. You saw that?"

*Sir John.* "Of course I did."

*Ernsford.* "Exactly; you saw the immediate result, and jumped to the conclusion that it was 'propter hoc.' That's the way that you cynics anatomise human nature; you never get below the cuticle of the body social. Now, the fact is, my opinion of your opinions is not derived from any particular remark, but from the general effect of them in combination."

*Sir John.* "Pleasant to mine eye is the fresh verdancy of an unsophisticated human

heart. Let's hear you anatomise my—what do you call it?"

*Ernsford.* "I was afraid that you would be bored already by the turn the conversation happened to take—one thing leading on to another: but if you like it—all right. *Imprimis*: I think you said that a man's private life was no business of anybody's. Now, seeing that society is composed of individuals mutually influencing and influenced, it appears to me (under correction) that one is as much interested in the moral as in the physical condition of one's neighbour. In these days of 'movements' I don't despair of seeing a moral *sanatory commission*. Joking apart, however, you can't fairly expect every one to distinguish the very faint line which the 'lex non scripta' of public opinion draws between a man's private life and the inadmissible exhibition of it. In a country like England, where personal liberty clears the course,

appearances and reality will run pretty much neck and neck; so that I can't wonder so much at the exhibition made by that lout—an exhibition not more disgraceful and less public than is seen every evening in the Haymarket, close to the opera-house; the only difference between the two being that in the latter case the instances are multiplied."

*Sir John.* "What I said of the lout was not merely on the score of publicity: it referred still more to the scurvy way of treating the chubby little girl's bouquet. My feeling was much more chivalrous than conventional."

*Ernsford.* "I'll endorse anything you like to add on that score; but I think we're getting on the disputed territory between private life and the inadmissible exhibition of it; since you say that you object to the act itself more than the moment selected for it, just after having said that a man's



private life is nobody's business. But, tell me, do you place the ostlers and cads to the account of the act itself, and by publicity mean Lady Rossden's carriage . . . ."

Ernsford waited for an interruption. Sir John scorned in silence the insinuation.

Ernsford proceeded: "A little while ago you quoted a law maxim. Now I think there is one which says, '*Quælibet concessio fortissime contra donatorem interpretandum est*:' but the difficulty in this case would be to decide which interpretation would best answer that purpose; for if the word publicity refers only to Lady Rossden's carriage, it follows that things done before the '*profanum vulgus*' cannot be condemned on the ground of public propriety; whilst if it includes the ostlers and cads, the act itself (which you reprobate) stands alone on its intrinsic merits—a very pretty picture of the lout's manners, customs, and habits of thinking. And then

what becomes of your dogma, that a 'man's private life is no business of anybody's?'"

*Sir John* (with an uncomfortable sort of laugh). "All that, my dear fellow, is made up out of an *ex parte* view of what I said. I'll talk about that another time. I should like now to hear what you have to say about the *grosse blonde*—supposing her to be the wife of a fresh-planted squire."

*Ernsford*. "Not knowing anything about her, I can only take an average view, and speak generally. What you said is true enough as far as it goes; but the springs of action in average human beings are alternately light and dark, like a revolving light; and you cynics always contrive to get on the dark side."

A gate-house, standing at the north side of a court-yard, stopped the conversation and the dog-cart simultaneously.

Further description of Ernsford Court  
VOL. I. D

is postponed, in consequence of the length of this chapter.

"How early do you wish to arrive at Perrington? When do you like to breakfast?" said Ernsford, as he showed the guest his room.

"Thank you very much," replied Sir John: "whenever it suits you. I'm sure to get there before Lady RosSDen; but perhaps I had better join them at Moorfield, as you say they are going to stop there on their way home. Well—how did you get all those ideas into your head, old fellow? (they're very unpractical) but——"

A cloud passed over Ernsford's countenance as he replied:

"*'Τὰ παθήματα, μαθήματα.'* I fancy that suffering has taught me more than anything else."

## CHAPTER IV.

## "THE UGLY DUCK"

—TURNED out to be a swan, in Hans Christian Andersen's beautiful story; and the snubbed member of a family often discloses a nature superior to the rest: but an ugly duck is not always a swan, nor a snubbed child a genius; and the alternative is a snare to parents and instructors, for the inward struggles of embryo power and the jerky blundering of lazy stupidity are difficult of discrimination: the desultoriness of all-craving ability and the diffuseness of inapprehensive stolidity intersect one another.

From which it would seem to follow, that

psychological pathology ought to be studied by progenitors and professional educators of youth—as it will be, no doubt, in another century, unless book-learning merges, ere then, into book-keeping by double entry in those palmy days to come, when the seat of government shall be removed to the Free Trade Hall at Manchester, and all classical allusions be forbidden in the House of Commons.

In the interim, there is an ugly duck in the school-room at Moorfield—whether a swan *incomprise*, or a common mud-dabbler of inferior quality, the reader will determine in the sequel.

The sun, whose first pre-evidence of its rising on that day was co-instantaneous with the nauseous exhibition already brought before the reader, and whose rising through the frost mist lighted Ernsford and Sir John Campion out of the good town of Tedminster, was now shining in

through the window of the school-room at Moorfield with the peculiar asperity which characterises that fickle planet when its rays shoot aslant through an east window at nine o'clock on an April morning after a fortnight's rain.

Sunlight penetrating in this wise through a low window, whose blind and curtains are carefully undrawn, is not becoming to human beings in general, nor to those in particular who are now sitting in unloving duality before a table fronting the east window.

The first was a lady of five feet eight without her shoes—age quite uncertain either way—hair whitey brown—complexion two or three shades darker than her hair—eyes giving light without warmth, and quite unshaded, like the east window above mentioned—figure straight and flat, with shoulders sloping after the manner of

champagne bottles—fingers nerveless, with white-speckled nails.

The second was a girl at that time of life called domestically an awkward age—a term which some learned commentators have interpreted to mean a critical intermediate period, of uncertain duration, which elapses before experience has cobbled up the broken leading strings of childhood: others, again, contend that the meaning is purely material, signifying the stiffness of limbs newly enlarged. But however this may be, Miss Constance Grahame, sister of the beautiful *débutante* whose letter descriptive of her first ball has already been quoted correctly, including the punctuation, was in the middle of the period referred to; and possibly this and the following chapter may throw some light on the meaning of the disputed term—so far as generals may be inferred from particulars.

Her features, viewed abstractedly, were

regular and quasi-classical; but being, as it were, too much for a figure not only undeveloped, but disfigured by a slight accidental deformation, left on many observers an unpleasant impression, such as, when analysed, means unconscious anger and disappointment at the existence of some quality which prevents them from despising its possessor in comfort, and whispers to the patronising sneer its twin brotherhood with fear-born respect.

The prevailing characteristic of her complexion was sallowness, and that of her countenance passion in its primary sense; the former much influenced by the latter. Her hair was long, thick, and as nearly black as hair will grow on an English head except in rarest instances. Her eyes were dark, with a singular expression, varying between resentfulness and self-reproach; her countenance puzzling, and hence generally interpreted as sullen. Her dress was



a green merino gown, defective in hooks and eyes, badly made, and worse put on; low shoes, with superfluous toes; cotton stockings too large in the ankle; an outgrown collar, ink-stained, tumbled, and fastened crookedly by a black pin. Her hair was "got rid of" \* in a knot terminating just below the organ of self-esteem. Her movements were constrained by an iron machine of complicated structure, worn under the green merino gown for the purpose of assisting nature in correcting a slight spinal curvature,—the combined

\* Domestic term, signifying one of divers methods whereby comfort is dutifully sacrificed to the genius of ugliness. An anonymous writer describes it as "a term excellently chosen, being typical of that which should be done with the elder sister ere the younger ceased to have her hair so dressed." But this was written some years ago. The worthy moralist who wrote it never saw the present rising generation—he never saw children of twelve years old in Malakhoff petticoats and stiff silks, with hair à la Chinoise, and countenances expressive of impudent defiance.

result of inefficient exercise and listless slouching over the table:

Whereat she and Miss Donaldson, the governess with the white-speckled nails and champagne bottle shoulders, were sitting, on or about 9 A.M. on the morning after the ball at Tedminster, and just three hours after Ernsford's dog-cart pulled up at the gate-house.

Miss Donaldson had a high tuitional reputation; having proved eminently successful in cramming small varieties showily upon the surface of several shallow minds. A rigid economist of time was she, exercising her pupils to say their prayers in a different modern language every day, and write a paraphrase on the conversation at luncheon, so as simultaneously to exercise their memories, practise them in English composition, and teach them the rudiments of conversation.

She sat with her feet on a *chauffepied*,

working a pair of slippers for a popular preacher. Constance sat a couple of feet abreast of her, doing nothing and looking at the same. Uprose Miss Donaldson's chin.

"I thought you were going to atone this morning for your idleness," said she. "I *really* thought that I had made *some* impression upon you yesterday—I thought that shame at the idea of appearing so ignorant in the world, if no better feeling actuated you, would," &c. &c.

Meanwhile Constance had opened the book, which was *Undine*, and began to read and translate. "Lassen Sie sich freundlich darauf nieder, weil der eine Bein nicht all zu—Let thyself friendly thereupon down, for the one bone not all to solid more is—"

"Stop! What are you about? which copy—I mean, how *can* you be so stupid?" said Miss Donaldson hurriedly; the conscious blush suffusing her cheek, as this

curious specimen of translation revealed to her the fact that her own copy of the book, printed on the Hamiltonian system, had accidentally fallen into the hands of her pupil. She charged through the difficulty on that hard-worked animal popularly known as the "high horse."

"Who *can* this belong to?" said she quickly, taking out of her pupil's hand the offending volume, which, in the movement, silently answered her question by disclosing her own name written by herself legibly on a fly-leaf.

"Il n'y a pas de positions ridicules que ceux qu'on n'accepte pas franchement:" thought Miss Donaldson, who had read "*La Dame aux Perles*" *sub rosa*. "Oh, of course, it's the book—yes to be sure—my poor cousin in India sent it to me as a joke.—Now, *are* you going to do anything? It really is disgraceful. You lost the whole day yesterday, dawdling over your sister's

dress. One would have thought *you* had been going to the ball, from your inattention to your studies. I wonder you never can take pattern from your sister—and *she* so beautiful too (now do be quick and fetch your German Bible) and so admired. Now that she has come out and to be presented, I have nothing further to do—I only remained on her account—I cannot waste my time and intellect on a pupil like yourself—it would quite injure my health and spirits—you never make the slightest effort to profit by my instructions—never. It's quite hopeless, for you have no proper pride—only small vanity. One would think you had all your sister's personal attractions, instead of (now *do* find your place)—but it's no matter. I may worry myself into a fever, for it makes no more impression (now *are* you going to begin? It's the first chapter of Genesis) than—than nothing at all. Now look over it first

(for of course you have not got it ready for me) and be quick about it."

On looking round a few minutes later, to supervise the process of "getting ready," Miss Donaldson discovered (*horresco referens*) her pupil writing in pencil on the margin of the first chapter of Genesis. On examination the suspicious writing proved to be from the prologue to Faust—

"Von Sonn' und Welten weiss ich nichts zu sagen :  
Ich sehe nur wie sich die Menschen plagen."\*

Whether this was dictated by the "Spirit of denial" or the spirit of idleness is a question left to the judicious reader; but Miss Donaldson (who *must* know best—or how could she have been teaching all her life?) considered that it was mere lazy scribbling, just like every

\* MEPHIS. :

"I have nothing to say about the suns and the worlds—

I only see how men torment themselves."

dunce that ever was: and this view of the case she stated at intervals till twelve o'clock, when she dismissed her pupil with this parting benediction:

"There, now, that will do for this morning—I never saw such a stupid girl since I was born."

"I ought to know that by this time, for I've been told so ever since I can remember anything:" said Constance.

"More shame for *you* not to have profited by it:" said Miss Donaldson, insuring for herself the last word by disappearing through the door.

## CHAPTER V.

“ One with her auburn tresses lightly bound,  
And fair brows gently drooping, as the fruit  
Nods from the tree, was slumbering with soft breath  
And lips apart, which showed the pearls beneath.”

BYRON : *Don Juan*.

WHETHER Constance tried any portion of the shame so freely prescribed for her, is a question respecting which no certain information has reached her biographer; but certain it is that she and Miss Donaldson disappeared at the same moment through two different doorways at opposite ends of the room—parting to meet again, after the manner of the pair of scissors on the old seal.

Constance hurried forward till she came



to a door to the left, on the upper side of a flight of steps, where she stopped, turned the handle with noiseless rapidity, and entered the room.

A scene more antithetical than that within can hardly be conceived. Edith Grahame lay sleeping off refreshfully the mild fatigue of a first ball; her mind resting in dream-land, pillowed on vaguely delicious sensations and regretless triumphs; her body reposing its refinedly voluptuous form in an attitude of graceful satisfaction — a living sentient line of beauty. A tress of auburn hair fell waving over her bosom, like a track of sunbeams on the sea when it heaves gently on a summer's morning. Unconsciously she twined her fingers round the end of it, as she stretched forth her arms and turned herself round in the physical action of waking. The first object that her eyes fell upon was Constance standing by the bedside, joyless and blood-

less-sallow ; her child-figure, whose development art and accident had combined to check, contrasting discordantly, with a countenance expressive of suffering prematurity :

For which term I apologise — but know no other pair of words that will at all indicate the thing I mean.

In the dull monotonous story of her ostensible education per Miss Donaldson, there was a private underplot, which proceeded in a manner highly irregular and perplexing. The perception of the feelings (*αἰσθησις*) seemed to be over-developed comparatively with the perception of the mind (*νόησις*) ; whilst the latter would, by fits and starts, show itself suddenly in some uncalled-for manner, and then retire within itself, to remain, for an indefinite period, apparently unimpressed and unimpressible.

Which state of things not entering into

Miss Donaldson's scheme of the world educational, the result was eminently unsatisfactory to both parties, especially the pupil, who, after enjoying various and contradictory titles of reproach, was now, at the age of fifteen, put on the shelf and labelled dunce—a general term which is to teachers as the word derangement to physicians—viz. a spare epithet of unlimited elasticity.

But the 'super-result was curious, and such as La Rochefoucauld would have been puzzled to account for by his cynical philosophy. Edith was beautiful, showily educated, idolised by her mother, and lauded by the domestic chorus. Constance, with a far more sensitive organisation, and a mind which, even if intellectually impracticable, had at least the larger share of that self-conscious and impatient thing—*power*, loved her sister with the unenvying, concentrated, exclusive affection of a dog. Perhaps the mighty force of beauty acted

upon its kindred qualities by that sympathy between the beautiful and the good which is expressed in the word *καλός*. Craving appreciativeness, undirected and without object, struggling to a half-consciousness of its own existence—such is the germ of hero-worship, whatever form it may assume.

Leaving her character and actuating impulses to unfold themselves gradually in the sequel, return we to the immediate march of events—starting from the moment when Constance entered the room and stood by her sleeping sister's bedside.

Full five minutes she remained there motionless. Her brow had relaxed from its rigid sullenness; her lips were parted in a strange smile, that indicated joy without being of it; her cheeks were coursed by tears that rolled slow, solitary, and unnoticed.

Presently the bedclothes upheaved in quick undulations; the graceful limbs beneath began to move by the sleepy volition of returning consciousness; the dimpled arms were stretched upwards till they touched the pillow-frill; the stray auburn tress fell waving into the unclasped fingers; the large warm-coloured, refinedly voluptuous eyes of Edith Grahame opened joyously to the waking world.

"Is that you, darling Constance?" said she.

Ere the mists of sleep had passed from before her eyes, the tear-courses were dry on her sister's cheek. In a few seconds Edith sprang from her bed—a model of sentient beauty.

"I am so glad you are awake! I long to know how you enjoyed your ball:" said Constance in a voice soft and emotional—a voice that Miss Donaldson could hardly have recognised. "I hope you enjoyed it

—very much, and — saw no one you liked better than — than Edgar.”

“I enjoyed it immensely, darling. And everybody was so kind to me, and liked me so much :” replied Edith, bestowing much attention upon the act of enslippering her soft, white feet.

Perhaps Constance objected to sharing her sister’s attention with the slippers ; perhaps she wished for the reiteration of a welcome answer ; but, from whatever cause resulting, an expectant silence was her commentary on Edith’s reply.

Edith raised her eyes from the slippers, turned round communicatively, and began over again.

“But you have not answered my question :” said Constance, persistently, her voice becoming less soft and more emotional.

Edith threw her arms round her sister’s neck, and before the latter had recovered

her equilibrium, commenced anew at "I enjoyed it immensely," &c. &c. &c. Sliding her symmetrical figure into a blue Cashmere wrapper, she went on to say:

"No; nobody that I liked better, of course not; and Lord Ravensdale was charming, too; and I think Edgar was jealous of him; but he's not as nice as Edgar; and Sir John Campion was charming, so clever and satirical; and I was more proud of his attentions than of Lord Ravensdale's, for he's so fastidious, and never speaks to young ladies; and he amused me so much, and said such witty things, every one wondered at my dancing twice with him. It was all very delightful, very; and how delightful it will be in London!"

"And did you think of me at all while you were at the ball?" said Constance, after a pause.

A strange question this; but he who

questions its probability knows little of the human heart — nothing of woman's heart-development — nothing of the Protean and often inexplicable forms in which the mighty passion, all-potent for good or ill, is foreshadowed so obscurely that the connection between the foreshadowment and the thing foreshadowed is scarcely traceable. Unnatural, even more than Constance's question, will this remark be deemed by many ; but, for all that, there is in the heart of almost every girl of school-girl age a connected, but not blood-related, *locum tenens* of the great passion — a preparative type of excellence, real, imaginary, or idealised, which first calls forth the faculty of admiration, and brings something beyond self within the sphere of self-love.

At any rate, Constance distinctly asked the question, "Did you think of me at all while you were at the ball?"

"To be sure I did:" answered Edith.



"But why do you look disappointed? I really believe you are jealous."

Constance turned full upon her sister's countenance a pair of eyes which, at the moment, threw a shadow over her own, and replied, "No, a year ago, perhaps. . . . But I am not a child now, though. . . . No, no—when I said that, I meant to ask whether Sir John Campion put every one else out of your head. . . . But I am only joking. . . . You must be quick, or Lady RosSDen will be here before you are dressed. How often did you dance with Edgar?"

"Why, the fact was, I could not . . . the room was so crowded, and I was engaged . . . ."

"To?"

"Different people—but why?"

"Because I see plainly that you are already beginning to be dazzled—already forgetting how you said, only a week ago,

that you would never marry any one but Edgar."

"And why do you wish it so much, when you know that mamma, and even papa, would not like it—you know they would not," said Edith, turning round and bestowing much attention on some dresses in a hanging wardrobe.

"That's because mamma. . . . Well, I can't tell why; but I know that it's all wrong—everything is wrong," replied Constance, in a tone that caused her sister to abandon her hanging wardrobe and her line of defence simultaneously.

"You are my best adviser, dearest Constance, though you are two years younger than me—you know that I really"—a knock at the door prevented the remainder of the sentence from being handed down to posterity.

"Lady Rossden is come:" said the voice of Miss Donaldson, or rather one of her

voices—the one in present use being of a very different quality from that in which she pronounced the dismissing benediction erewhile recorded.

“Come in, Miss Donaldson :” said Edith. “So they’re come . . . they’re very early . . . And is Lord Sevenoaks come too?”

“Of course he is, my dear :” answered Miss Donaldson, entering, with a countenance beaming and significant.

Edith returned to the hanging wardrobe, and remarked : “Well, I always thought him dull ; but really last night the contrast of his conversation with Lord Ravensdale’s . . . eh, Miss Donaldson ?”

But Miss Donaldson was not going to be checkmated by a girl of seventeen, on the morning after her first ball—a girl whom she, Miss Donaldson, had taught, from “Mangnall’s Questions” up to Schiller,

and the "Gerusalemme Liberata" included. Her countenance beamed continuously, and dropping the sententious tone of the ex-governess, she answered frankly :

"He's very shy ; but there is a good deal in him — as you would find if you were to draw him out. But I can't wonder at your finding Lord Ravensdale more agreeable ; for I have always heard that he is one of the most agreeable young men of the day."

"So he is:" said Edith, for the third time turning away from the hanging wardrobe, without having effected anything therein. "Yes, and Lady Julia is going to tell me all about him . . . it was so dreadful—you know she was their governess, and . . ."

The rest of the sentence was as inaudible as Miss Donaldson's answer was meant to be ; but the latter was given with so much volition that Constance overheard it.

Perhaps it was "burnt into the air"—a phenomenon in acoustics which I once read of in a novel.

"I don't know, I am sure, what Lady Julia means:" said Miss Donaldson, assuming a voice and manner intended and fairly adapted to exclude all rival views of the case. "I don't know what she means; and I don't think she knew what she was talking about. *But young men will be young men, and sow their wild oats. Nothing is so likely to produce unhappiness as prying into these things—besides being improper.*"

"Improper to talk of, but not to do! God help me!" said Constance, in a low, passionate voice. "What am I to believe?"

"You are exceedingly impertinent:" replied Miss Donaldson, again insuring for herself the last word by disappearing through the doorway.

Constance violently pushed the already closed door, and burst into a passionate flood

of tears, as incontrollable as it was sudden, like a southern storm-shower.

"You *must* not—you *shall* not marry him:" said she, after a minute or two. "I know there is something very, very wrong . . . and Lord Ravensdale behaved shamefully . . . and it was all very wicked . . ."

"Tell me all about it, and don't make yourself miserable:" interrupted Edith, in a voice of emotion mixed with curiosity. "What could have put it into your head that I should marry Lord Ravensdale? I am sure he never thought of such a thing."

"No, not yet; but . . ."

"When I gave him no encouragement? . . ."

Miss Donaldson, whose three former pupils had married respectively two peers and a baronet, would, had she been present, have mentally ejaculated, "If there was no question of attention, there could be no

question of encouragement." But Constance was only fifteen, and loved her sister with that sort of self-abasing homage that mind struggling pays to mind satisfied, even when the former is the stronger creation of the two; therefore she accepted her sister's words at the value claimed for them by the speaker, and said :

"Little Laura told me all about it, though nobody thinks she knows . . . I forget her name — her mother was an Italian, but she was their governess when they were abroad, and in London two years ago. And she was more beautiful than any one. And she was so good—so good—did everything right, just as one reads of, and I never see people do . . . and she did everything she could to avoid him, and . . ."

A sound of rustling silk passing hurriedly by the door, propelled by a heavy body, caused the story to be broken off at this the most interesting point.

"There you are, Constance, making your sister late as usual:" said the voice of Mrs. Grahame from the rustling silk. "They've been here these five minutes—it's shameful!"

The sound of the rustling silk, and the steps that propelled it, receded in the distance; but the mysterious story had to be postponed, and Edith to be attired by the Graces, and Susan Spuckers, the lady's-maid.

Preceding her to the drawing-room, we find the before-mentioned visitors from Per-ringston—Lady RosSDen, two of her daughters, and her eldest son, who, for the avoidance of prejudice and misconception, we may as well notice fairly while the time serves.

Whether or no Miss Donaldson viewed Lord Sevenoaks' qualities through the medium of his heir-apparentship, as affirmed by Edith, her conclusion was right, and Edith's wrong. His silence was not of



awkwardness, stupidity, or ill-breeding, but of anxious, self-doubting expectancy. The hackneyed apology for dulness, "something in him," was, in his case, both true and insufficient. He bade fair to be numbered among those who minister more or less to the necessities of the day.

Lady Julia, on the contrary, ministered largely to its follies. In everything was she the deteriorated antithesis of her mother. Lady RosSDen was graceful and courteous — Lady Julia jerky and rude ; Lady RosSDen's features were handsome, and her manners reposeful — Lady Julia's face was shaped like a skull, and she gesticulated in a series of angles. To young ladies her manner was impertinent ; to young gentlemen it was half cringing, half defiant. She wore her hat sloping downwards from the back of her head, and shook hands as if she were giving a side-long jerk at a bell-pull.

There is a bird, generally found on commons in England, and much courted at Michaelmas; and this bird always ducks its head when going under an archway, however high, as though unwilling to recognise the evidence of comparative measurement. A narrow-minded old lady, jealous of the angularities which she could not hope to imitate, once drew therefrom a comparison that I should not like to repeat.

The second daughter, Lady Mary (already mentioned, in Edith's letter to the young lady who could not go to the ball at Tedminster because the measles were in the house, as having been always thrown at her by Miss Donaldson) was a copy of Lady RosSDen with a weaker outline.

"Sir John Campion did not like the appearance of his room at the 'Star:.'" said Lady RosSDen to Mrs. Grahame, as they went in to luncheon. "He sent up word to me that he was going to sleep at Ernsford

Court, and would drive back to Perringston this morning, or perhaps join us here — as he had the pleasure of being introduced to you last night.”

“I should be most happy to see him — and Lord Ravensdale, too.”

“He went to Yorkshire this morning.”

“Here comes Edgar’s dog-cart,” said Mr Grahame; “but he’s not with it himself.” he added, with a look of genuine disappointment.

“He comes and goes when he likes:” said Mrs. Grahame. “He’s like a *brother* to my girls:” continued she, her face beaming with the pleasure of contemplating such fraternal affection.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Constance, you must come with me to sketch at Ernsford to-morrow morning:” said Edith, in a low voice, as they went upstairs after Lady RosSDen had driven off.

With this record of her resolution we will close this chapter.

## CHAPTER VI.

“CONTRA miglior voler voler mal pugna,”\* says the divine poet ; and the public assents to his dictum — a fact from which he must derive much satisfaction on the Trans-Stygian shores. But it is to be feared that not even the great educational specific, competitive examination, can make us capable of deciding with certainty which of two wills is really the stronger, seeing that it is well-nigh impossible to discern—1st, how far one of the two may, by the force of circumstances, be taken at a disadvantage ; 2ndly, what turn of events may have altered their relative feelings and positions ; 3rdly, when the

\* Ill fights the weaker will against a stronger.

struggle may be said to be finally concluded ; 4thly, how far and in what relative proportions feeling and passion may act as modifying agents.

I am not in a position to state positively whether Edith thought all this as she drove the pony-carriage to Ernsford Court on the following morning ; but she said —

“ . . . And after being so admired . . . it's very, very hard that the only one I care for should be so insensible — very, very hard ! ”

“ But you forget,” objected Constance, practically, “ that he knows nothing of your feelings yet — how should he ? how can he know what passes between ourselves ? ”

“ But can't he feel to care for me till he knows for certain whether —— ? ”

This was unanswerable, it being remembered that Constance was only fifteen and hero-worshipped her sister. Full ten min-

utes they drove without speaking, when Edith broke silence as follows:

“Now mind that you don’t stay to catch cold where I draw. You know how cold it is there, and you had a bad cold the other day. By the bye, you can walk down to the further lodge, and ask old Dame Rolf how she does.”

“But my cold is quite well now, and it’s so mild to-day. I would rather stay and talk to you,” urged Constance in a spirit of the purest and most accommodating disinterestedness.

Marcus Aurelius recommends people to limit their minds to such images as they may acknowledge with confidence if suddenly questioned thereon; and we, being a commercial nation, have determined the value of such acknowledgment in the homely saying, “A penny for your thoughts.”

But it may reasonably be doubted whe-

ther any of us would much enjoy being called upon at odd times to give a cold outline of the heart's present phantoms. "Happiness is born a twin"—not one of a litter.

The above is supposed to be an abstract of Edith's reflections when Constance affectionately offered to brave the cold of the east terrace for her sake. She said nothing; but the first conscious blush of fresh womanhood gradually suffused her cheek.

Constance did not offer a penny for her thoughts, but endeavoured to obtain possession of them by a *coup-de-main* that did credit to her sagacity.

"I would much rather stay with you; but if you really think I should catch cold—why, perhaps I had better take this opportunity (as we go to town to-morrow) and get Edgar to take me to see the new cottages——"

"No, no! when I am going on purpose to——"

"To complete your sketch of the old gate-house and quadrangle, I know——"

"It's the last opportunity before we leave, and I wish to——"

"Get it nearly done, so as to finish it from memory. You promised it to Lady Rossden for her album——"

"I don't mean that! Constance! you are a child, a——"

"Child, if you will; but I see what is passing in your mind, and you are trying to conceal it from me and yourself too. You mean to make him tell you——"

"I do."

"Edith! I may be a child, or nearly a child in age, and still more so in my stunted experience, snubbed as I have been; but this I know, and will repeat, as long as time serves for me to raise my voice in warning, that you are wrong—wrong in more ways than I can explain



or even understand myself. It never can have struck him yet in such a light——”

“In what light?”

“I don’t know—I can’t explain; but I know it’s all wrong. It’s so sudden, too—not even at the ball—You were so full of Lord Ravensdale till Lady Rossden came yesterday, and Lord Ravensdale was expected too——,”

“Dearest Constance, I have often told you that you are my best adviser:” interrupted Edith, in a gentle, emotional tone of voice. “You are generally right, but this time you mistake me. Lord Ravensdale was very agreeable, and so was Sir John Campion; and of course I was proud of being so much admired and noticed, and all that; but there was no feeling in all that—only novelty and amusement. I never can love any one but Edgar; and the only reason why I spoke to you about coming here was, because I was so disappointed at

seeing the dog-cart drive up without him; and I thought at luncheon-time how infinitely superior he was to Sir John, with all his reputation for agreeability; and I am *sure* that Edgar . . . I watched him at the ball; and I would give worlds that, before we leave for three months—I should be miserable otherwise . . . Oh, Constance, you *must* help me—indeed you must!”

By this time they were within half-a-mile of the house; and Constance's objections had long since been exhausted.

Ernsford was at home, and with very moderate alacrity followed them to the east terrace, where he saw Edith slowly unpacking her drawing materials, and Constance driving briskly down the avenue.

“She's gone to look at the new cottages:” said Edith.

“But they're not begun yet—we've had such late frosts this year:” said Ernsford. “I think I had better call her back.”

Edith made no reply, but bent abstractedly over the portfolio she was untying: meanwhile Constance was quickly passing out of sight and sound. Ernsford stood there irresolute and unable to account for his irresolution; insomuch that Edith's question, "Can't he feel to care for me?" &c. appeared to be growing either more complicated or less so.

There he stood, halting between two opinions, alternately impelled by the claims of good-breeding and a vague impression of being in the wrong place.

Yet why by either? Precedents without exception seemed to render either unnecessary. As long as Edith and Constance could remember, he had been, as Mrs. Grahame stated with so much emphasis, "like a brother to them," Mr. Grahame having lived ten years at Ernsford Court as his sole guardian.

A few days before, when Edith began the

sketch that she now came to finish, no such scruples had entered his mind ; and there seemed to be no reasonable grounds for them on the present occasion. Had sudden prudery come over him, in respect of her having been to her first ball since then ? Had any feeling, other than fraternal, been roused from dormancy, to his own satisfaction or otherwise ? Finally, was he simply busy, and unwilling either to put off his business or leave his cousin to sketch alone ? With individuals as with books, the context often explains obscure passages ; and the sequel of Ernsford's history will explain this. But from whatever cause, one fact was evident : both were ill at ease, and Edith by far the most so.

Full ten minutes they remained on the east terrace, spell-bound by an oppressive silence which neither could break. The virgin blush of feelings unexplored, yet ineffably delicious, suffused her cheek as

warmly as when she drove through the avenue; but she turned her head away, and her face almost touched the drawing-paper.

At length Ernsford broke the silence, which was becoming intolerable to both.

"Then you are going to London to-morrow?" said he. He had been told so at least twenty times during the previous ten days.

A very faint "Yes," reverberating scarce audibly from the drawing-paper, affirmed the date; but either he was not satisfied as to its correctness, or doubtful of his own memory in that particular; for within five minutes he again repeated—

"Then you are going to London to-morrow?"

The same unsupported monosyllable reverberated from the drawing-paper as faintly as before.

"That will be for some time?"

"Four months, even if we come here,—

I mean to Moorfield, then. But mamma wishes to go abroad ; and if so, it will be a very long time——”

“ Which will *not* pass quickly—for the mind passes quickest over dulness, as the eye does over a plain—at least it appears so to me ; but it will pass with a kind of rapid emphasis. Everything will be new and successive to you for the next five months—perhaps longer.” He paused, and yet seemed to hover on the brink of experimental sentences. This second period of silence was worse than the first ; for then he hesitated in his own mind, now he hesitated audibly ; then he was delaying—now he was floundering. The pause widened till it seemed impossible to overleap it, whilst the incumbency upon him to do so grew more evident. Edith was no longer the school-girl who began that sketch ten days before ; and her silence was continuous, helpless, circumstantial, womanly.

Several experimental sentences failed before he got through the following:—

“No. 180, Belgrave Square, then?”

The same bare affirmative succeeded this question: the same extractive silence succeeded the affirmative. Not less impressed with the incumbency of saying something, than with his own inability to decide what that something should be, under all applicable circumstances, he advanced a step nearer to Edith, with the self-avowed intention of examining her sketch and descanting upon it. But if the sketch engaged his attention, another and a different picture riveted it. The pencil was moving at random over the paper, unrestrained by the fair hand that held it: a crystal drop trickled irrepressibly from under the drooped eyelashes.

The applicable circumstances appeared to become fewer and more simple. Ernsford moved a step nearer and said—

“Edith!”—A word nowise explanatory of the emotional tone in which it was pronounced—being one that he had been in the constant habit of pronouncing, as a matter of course, from the age of eight years to the present moment exclusive.

The sentence, of what kind soever, to which the above seemed to be the initial word, was never finished; for Edith rose from her seat, and drawing her veil over her face with a gentle *nolle prosequi* gesture, moved along the terrace. Ernsford stood rooted to the spot; and when, a minute or two later, Constance returned from her anticipatory visit to the cottages, his mind seemed for an instant not to take in her identity.

“I think we must be going home now,” said Constance, instructively. “It’s nearly one o’clock, and we have several things to do before we leave home to-morrow.”

The relative positions of the two sisters



seemed to be suddenly reversed : Constance now led, and Edith followed passively. After they had gone nearly a mile on their road home — Constance driving — Edith pulled up her veil, turned her flushed cheek to the fresh breeze that blew aslant the road, and looked at Constance expectantly. Constance looked at her from under her eyelashes, but said nothing : and thus they proceeded to within half-a-mile of Moorfield, when Edith suddenly burst into tears.

“*I was wrong,*” said she, in a voice audible but almost inarticulate. Still Constance said nothing, but listened with strained attention. Edith pulled her veil over her face as they drove in at the lodge, and said confessively—

“*I was wrong to wish him to—I know it—I felt it while you were gone to the cottages ; and I am afraid I showed what I felt. And he despises me for it ; and yet*

I only did what I have done hundreds of times before—we were brought up together like brother and sister—I only wished to know if he felt to care about me. How *could* I betray myself so ?”

They drove in through the stable-yard, and went up by a back staircase to Edith's room, where they were soon after serenaded, as on the preceding day, by a voice from the rustling silk.

“There you are, Constance, delaying your sister,” &c. &c.

“Who is here to-day ? was any one expected ?” said Edith, looking undecidedly from the door to the looking-glass.

“You *must* go,” answered Constance firmly. Edith obeyed, as if unable to resist ; yet Constance was only fifteen, and hero-worshipped her sister.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Dolor, perchè mi meni,  
Fuor di cammin, a dir quel ch’i’ non voglio?”

PETRARCA.

AT half-past six the following morning Constance came softly out of her room, and descended the same back stairs by which she had reached Edith’s room the day before. She passed through one of two doors placed on either side at the foot of the staircase, and unlocking another at the end of a short passage, walked straight to the stables. The first person she met was the old coachman, whose astonishment she anticipated and allayed as follows:

“I want to take a turn by the wood

before breakfast, as we're going away for some time; but the dew is so heavy. Can you saddle Muff for me?"

A child's side-saddle, with low pummels and a large crupper, was put upon a shaggy black pony rather under twelve hands. Constance mounted, and made for the wood, which was about a quarter of a mile from the house, and formed the boundary of the park on that side; but instead of skirting it, as she had indicated, she turned into the wood itself, and, cantering along a private bridle-path that led through it for three or four hundred yards, came out upon a green lane. Crossing the lane, and opening a gate on the other side, she rode through a series of white-gated meadows misty-white with dew, till she came to a parish road, on the other side of which she opened a bridle-gate, and followed a stoned path, flanked on one side by a hedge-row, on the other by a flat patch of arable land, green with the fresh-

springing barley. A farm-yard at the end of the field brought her, through a pair of dark-painted folding gates, into a deer-be-grouped, fern-patched dell, across which rabbits were flitting. Following the dell for about two hundred yards, she turned into a beech avenue, somewhere about the centre of its length, and in little more than twenty minutes from the time she started, pulled up at the gate-house of Ernsford Court.

The iron gate stood before her, cold, massive and unheeding—the Ernsford coat of arms interwoven with the trellis-work of it. Constance began to repeat to herself mentally her object in coming, and the reasons for having resolved to do so. Her resolution grew stronger from the contemplation; but her heart beat audibly.

“Deary me! Miss Constance! whatever brings you out a-horseback at this time of the morning? Well, I never!” said the old

woman at the gate-house, as she opened the gate.

“Good morning, dame!” said Constance. “I left behind some drawing things of Edith’s yesterday,—and she wants to take them to London,—and we start at eleven o’clock; and so I came myself.”

A more formidable person to encounter was the old butler, who had scolded two successive generations of Ernshfords, from childhood upwards, and had always done his duty by herself in like manner. Not unmindful of this, Constance thought the matter over again on her way from the gate-house to the entrance door; and the result was, that the resolution to carry out something secretly determined increased *pari passu* with the conviction that it was an offence against the proprieties.

In the frame of mind which such conflicting necessities were calculated to produce, she rang the bell. The bell clanged

with a more penetrating vibration than usual; and almost immediately the old butler, who happened to be near at the time, walked up in creaking shoes to the open door, and confronted her.

Taking the initiative, she addressed him with overwhelming volubility, as follows—

“Oh, Richards; I left behind some drawing things yesterday, so I cantered over for them, for we want to take them with us. You need’nt disturb Mr. Ernsford. The things must be in the gallery; but perhaps you *had* better tell him, for I dare say he put them away, and I must be back very soon, for we start for London this morning.”

Like a bull seized suddenly and firmly by the tail, the ancient major-domo went off quietly to apprise Ernsford of her visit, instead of scolding her for having ridden over by herself at seven o’clock in the morning.

But there remained to be encountered a yet more formidable person—formidable for the first time—formidable she could not tell fully why, but still formidable, as the tingling blood, that rushed into her cheek when she found herself in the gallery, proved to demonstration. She tried to reassure herself by looking at the familiar objects in this her favourite room; but they seemed as though defamiliarised, and looked coldly repelling.

For a few seconds, a few seconds only, an inherent love of the beautiful—her best, her only monitor still, as throughout her neglected childhood—gradually, but quickly restored to those objects their wonted mellowness, and gave back to the well-remembered room that appearance which is best described by the word “freundlich.”

She stood by a large oriel window at the east end of the gallery, her eyes turned to the coat of arms and figures in armour em-



blazoned on the upper compartments. The morning sunlight, shining through the brilliant red and azure tints of the old painted glass, fell becomingly upon features well and remarkably outlined, so that she started at seeing her own face in an old mirror opposite.

She started, first with surprise, then with a new, foreshadowing kind of emotion ; and there passed through her mind one of those ideal successions that follow each other almost instantaneously—a wordless parenthesis, digressive from the main subject, but intensely natural under the circumstances. Her own newly-discovered self, developed a few hours before, unshelled by her affection for her sister—the new vista prematurely opened out to herself through sisterly sympathy—the suddenly improved appearance of her own face in the old carved mirror—all these three ideas, combined rapidly and unknown to herself,

caused her mind to enclose itself in that brief but exclusive parenthesis.

The sun, entering horizontally through the painted glass, poured in a flood of warm light, that hung like a rose-tinted cloud above her head, and of her features, as sympathy does of the mind, gave, not a flattering, but a friendly, hopeful, prophetic view.

Involuntarily she drew nearer to the old mirror, and, taking off her riding hat, pushed back the thick masses of half-brushed black hair that fell from under it. Involuntarily she asked herself the question, "Am I so ugly after all?"

A question of much perplexity to her who thus propounded it, seeing that one view of the case was supported by natural perception and self-love, the other by custom and exclusive affection.

One cannot quite see why her sister's beauty should be an *a priori* argument for

her own ugliness: be it again remembered, however, that she was but fifteen, and hero-worshipped her sister, who, as the only specimen of female beauty that she had yet seen, was, in her eyes, the exclusive type of it. Her mental soliloquy ran thus:

“Am I so ugly, then, after all? My forehead is higher and much broader than Edith’s—too broad, for it makes my thin cheeks and my chin look so small—but I can’t help thinking that it may not perhaps be so by and by. My eyes, I should say, if they were not mine, are very like that old picture at Perringston—but that can’t be, for I know that’s a beauty. But they *do* seem very like it, too not when they are wild and fierce, as I know they look sometimes, when I hate everything—I never feel so when I’m looking at old painted glass. And my nose is like that print of (oh, my memory is hopeless, but I know the face very well), that print of—

But am I as bad as they tell me (all but Edith, and Edgar, and Rupert)? — and as stupid? I don't feel as if I were either, when I'm looking at old painted glass" —

The old painted glass, the rose-tinted light floating over her head, and the carved mirror reflecting her features hopefully, combined to produce on her child-woman's nature an impression new, undefined, foreshadowing, delicious. Her mentally worded reverie gradually resolved itself into a wordless, vague, sensuous day-dream æsthetically delicious.

From this unaccustomed day-dream she was presently recalled by the near sound of a step that made her start,

" ——— like a guilty thing  
Upon a fearful summons."

The door had been opened unnoticed by her: she turned her eyes from the old

carved mirror to encounter those of Ernsford.

Strange though it may seem, the thing she had feared proved to reassure her. Ernsford looked pre-occupied, sleepless, and puzzled, but he gazed kindly and sympathisingly on her: she felt that she was not standing on the defensive.

"You're out early, Constance," said Ernsford. "Nothing the matter at home, I hope?"

"No; nothing's the matter—only—only I want to speak to you. You will think it very wrong of me, I'm afraid."

"I think not. I know you better than you imagine, and, unless I am inconceivably mistaken, understand you better than any one—yourself included."

"You will not misunderstand me then?"

"You may rest satisfied that I will not."

"However strange it may seem? Whatever I may say?"

"However strange and unexpected it may be, I will not misunderstand you."

"Well then, Edith was so unhappy—but remember that she knows nothing about it, nor ever shall know that I took upon myself to . . . was so unhappy because, at the ball—and—yesterday—and she was so afraid, too, that——"

Ernsford paled visibly, though visibly paler than usual when he entered the room.

Constance continued: "She was afraid that she showed so very much yesterday that she—you know—but she *did* feel it—and was afraid that—Do help me out, dear Edgar! I am not old enough, or clever enough, or—and it's not exactly right for a young lady to—I know that—and yet I am trying to act for the best. *Do, do* help me out!"

"I will:" said Ernsford, in an unsteady voice. "You are doing an act of self-devotion which shows an heroic nature and a mind far beyond your age —

a mind self-developed, too, for you never had a chance : you are trying to serve your sister and — me, so that the risk may be all your own — risk, at home, of bitter, mortifying misconception, without any probable termination — risk of misconception from the very person you wish so much to serve. I must be a coward, a blackguard, or an idiot, not to help you. But I must exact *one* promise from you before I go any farther. What I tell you now must not be repeated to *any one*, except (if ever) by my permission.”

“It shall never pass my lips,” replied Constance, “nor be made known by me in any way to any one, except by your permission.”

After a pause of a few seconds, Ernsford continued. His face had become yet paler, and his voice more unsteady ; but he neither hesitated nor repeated a word.

“Edith was affected yesterday by a com-

bination of circumstances. Old associations connected with myself — her own first ball, at which I kept aloof from her — her approaching first season, and long absence from Moorfield — the view of the old gate-house, and the solitary old hall, where I live in ragged grandeur, like my namesake in the ‘Bride of Lammermoor’ — all this, and perhaps some vague perception of my own feelings, though I have carefully endeavoured to conceal them, made her fancy that she ——”

A chivalrous impulse made him pause: it was now Constance’s turn to help him out.

—“That she loved you:” said she. “But it was not fancy; and she is afraid that you don’t — oh, I’m *so, so* glad to find that you do — but I won’t say anything about it, unless you will let me do so.”

“Constance, I can hardly find it in my heart to pull down the fairy fabric that



your fancy has built upon your generous sympathies ; but it would be worse for all, if I were to look aslant at facts and probabilities. I will explain myself in as few words as possible. Edith has been the dream of my life, the mainspring of every action in it. When she was but four years old, and I twelve, I stole a lock of her hair one day when it was cut, and carried it off with me to school. No one has ever seen it — no one but yourself ever knew of it ; but I carry it about me, and shall do so while I live ; for that childish love has grown with me, and God only knows the strength of it. But I am chained by circumstances. If I had not had such opportunities — if we had not been thrown so much together — if she had been out a season in London — if she were poorer, and I better off — it would be different.”

“ Oh, Edgar ! when you have done so much with the property since you came of

age! Are you too proud to allow the woman who loves you the privilege of doing something to the work of restoration? Look at this old gallery; look at that coat of mail, worn by Sir Rupert Ernsford at Agincourt. Think of this magnificent old building and broad lands, encumbered past your own unassisted power to reclaim,—and think of her whose affections are involved in those interests, and whose happiness is bound up in yours. Angels have fallen by pride. Will you, good and noble as you are—will you wantonly sacrifice her and yourself?”

“I have no feeling of pride in the matter. Pride can have no place in an affection so absorbing as mine: pride could never throw a shadow between us. That the restoration you speak of should be effected by her would only enhance its value; but——”

“If, at the end of the season, you find

that she really is — that she does not care for any one else — but I need not ask you, for I *see* you will. Good-bye, I must be off, or Miss Donaldson will be up before I get back.”

“Stop! I’ll let you out by the new gate into the Quarry wood: you can get home in a mile and a half that way. I was just going to ride — I generally ride at this time of the morning in the spring.”

They rode together as far as the wood. Constance shook hands with Ernsford over the re-locked gate, and said:

“Good-bye! Then there is no more anxiety?”

“Would to God there were not!” said Ernsford, involuntarily, as he turned his horse’s head and rode back at a sharp canter.

As the clock struck eight Constance reached home, and entered the house through the same door by which she had

quitted it an hour and a half before. No one in the house had missed her, insomuch that when she came out of her room, half-an-hour afterwards, the voice from the rustling silk was heard in an angle of the passage, saying —

“There you are, Constance, again, late as usual.”

Meanwhile Edith was inslippering her soft white feet, and mentally ejaculating, “But can’t he feel to care for me, when he must see that I . . .?”

## CHAPTER VIII.

“POUR s'établir dans le monde, on fait tout ce qu'on peut pour y paraître établi :” says La Rochefoucauld. It is very doubtful whether Mrs. Grahame was acquainted with this solitary emanation of unadulterated truth from that clever writer of most unhealthy maxims ; but if not, her practical acquaintance with the truth itself entitles her to claim the credit of its authorship, according to the principle set forth by Locke —that the distinctive mark of invention lies “in the borrowing, or not borrowing, one's thoughts from another.”

It were a wearisome task to go through the old story of heart-sickening struggles,

and multiform sacrifices appreciated by nobody—a wearisome and a melancholy task; for such things often represent very real disappointments and sorrows—very real sacrifices, dictated by feelings worthy of a better object, yet, by reason of their unsuccess, fated to derision and contempt. We extend some measure of charity to every social mischief, save firmly mistaken conscientiousness. Pass we then briefly over Mrs. Grahame's first campaign in Belgrave Square.

Mrs. Grahame (*née* Mogg) was the very wealthy daughter of a very worthy and very intelligent manufacturer. Mr. Grahame was, pre-nuptially, a light dragoon of good family, with five hundred a year. Mrs. Grahame's father, in the exercise of his parental prerogative, sturdily insisted that she should retain her patronymic, which, deeming *de luxe*, she dropped soon after his death. A large income, and more than a

proportional balance—a good county position, to which her husband's connection with Ernsford added the stamp of county antiquity—a large house in Belgrave Square, redolent of dinners and balls, past, present, and future—a beautiful daughter, co-heiress of her mother's wealth—friends influential, more than one—fair cards these, and sure of speedy success!

Not so. If the doors of "great houses" *do* open to golden keys, they open somewhat slowly, and the locks are easily hampered. Moreover, the great world of London is most influenced by its intrinsic estimate of the *individual*, which, though often anomalous, and sometimes wrong, is thoroughly independent, even to capriciousness.

Mrs. Grahame did not happen to possess the personal qualities by which, with a tenth of her income, she would have rendered herself attractive to the social oligarchy; therefore, with all her advantages, she made

a *fiasco solenne*, which puzzled her extremely, as she was shrewd enough to perceive that her daughter possessed the missing qualities. She had yet to learn, that where she wished to be, a woman cannot attract by proxy.

Lady Rossden received them with distinctive civility, but could not inoculate the social oligarchy, though much sought by it herself. Lord Ravensdale and Sir John Campion manifested as much admiration for Edith as they had done at the Tedminster ball—that is, when they met, which happened only six times, three of which were at Mr. Grahame's house, and the remaining three at Lord Rossden's.

Meanwhile Constance, being deprived of Miss Donaldson's instructions, and left to make the most of a few pounds' worth of masters in her own way, was rapidly stultifying her ex-governess's predictions—those of every one, in fact, except Ernsford. In



point of fact, she had grown up in two days; and simultaneously with the general consciousness of power was the desire to develop it in detail. On the morning when, looking at the old-painted glass, she listened to words of praiseful encouragement from the person whose opinion she most valued, her mind felt itself freed from an incubus that had paralysed it. At home she had been most conscientiously mismanaged; a large, struggling, original brain was interpreted as deficiency—the want of self-esteem as its excess, and treated accordingly:

By copious snubbing, such as would have been a most valuable moral alterative to Lady Julia Perringston, and all other young ladies of the stamp now fashionable—who for dignity substitute impudent defiance, for grace, angular gesticulation, for self-forgetful courtesy, selfish rudeness; and whose only self-devotion consists in de-

voting themselves to the contempt of their pseudo admirers, by studiously endeavouring to ape servilely the appearance and manners of a "*traviata*."

To Constance the remedy was poison — poison to body, mind, and soul — poison that bade fair to neutralise the moral and intellectual power that was in her — poison that had begun to tell upon her, but was kept at bay by her love of the beautiful. How she grew up in two days has been already indicated; but an attendant circumstance claims admission.

On the morning of her ride to Ernsford Court, she took at random from the library a book to read during the journey. Turning over the leaves, her eyes fell upon a passage so applicable, that she started, and felt as if a guardian angel had guided her hand and eye to it. The passage was: "Le perfectionnement de soi-même, loin d'être une prérogative exclusivement ré-

servée à quelques-uns, est une carrière ouverte à tous; ouverte à l'être humble et méconnu de préférence peut-être à celui qui est remarqué." \*

With this humble, earnest passage for a motto, she unpretentiously began the laborious, unlimited work of self-education.

Mrs. Grahame went through with her season stoutly; remaining three calendar months and a half at No. 180, Belgrave Square, albeit Edith was weary of it before the middle of June, and Mr. Grahame did nothing but eat whitebait at Greenwich.

She gave two balls. Lady RosSDen sent most of the invitations; but on each occasion another ball, disturbed from its original date, retained three parts of the invited. Among those who *did* come (not by Lady RosSDen's invitation) "our own correspondent" noticed the following peo-

\* Degerando, "Du Perfectionnement Moral ou l'Éducation de Soi-même."

ple who had distinguished themselves at the Tedminster ball :

The hero of the bouquet, and the hero-worshipping friend of the same, the "Caterpillar," the "jolly little girl," and the "slapping fine woman."

## CHAPTER IX.

"Mai più della tua fede  
 Mai più non temerò ; per que' bei labbri  
 Lo giuro, o mio tesoro,  
 In cui del mio destin le leggi adoro."

METASTASIO: *La Gelosia.*

THE three calendar months and a half expired in a blaze, not of glory, but of wax-candles, at the house of the "slapping fine woman ;" and on the morrow the Grahame caravan started homewards by the East Western Railway, preparatory to a tour abroad.

Thus the happy family talked over the season :

*Mrs. Grahame.* "If you would only have done as I begged and prayed you to do, and

stirred yourself a little with the large acquaintance you used to have, instead of doing nothing but dine at Greenwich and hang about that nasty club——”

*Mr. Grahame.* “Used to have! that’s just it. I’ve not been about London these five-and-twenty years; and people forget one. Besides which, I never went about in society much; and the men I lived with are, nearly all of them, married long ago.”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “And what if they are?”

*Mr. Grahame.* “Well, the fact is, it’s not quite the same thing.”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “But why not? I ask you why not?”

Mr. Grahame declined answering the question, but saw no reason to alter his opinion. At this juncture the guard interrupted the conversation and the view, by introducing his head through the window, for the verification of tickets. Constance hoped that the subject would be dropped

with the parcels on the platform ; but she was mistaken. It started again with the train, thus :—

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ I ask you why not ? ”

*Mr. Grahame.* Hm—hm, hm ; well—God bless me ! . . . But, you see, you must have more patience—you can’t get everything all at once. Why didn’t you come to town a year or two before Edith came out ? eh ? eh ? eh ? ”

*Mrs. Grahame.* “ When you yourself objected ! I *must* say this is too bad. Haven’t we been enlarging Moorfield and making it habitable out of our income ever since my poor dear father died ? How much has that cost ? And how could we have been going to London all the time ? Two balls and a concert, that’s fifteen hundred pounds, six dinners, at five-and-thirty pounds each, that’s two hundred and ten more, Madame Jupe à la Malakoff’s bill, that’s eight hundred, two extra footmen for the season, that’s,

board-wages and living and all, nearly a hundred more ; a new carriage and hammer-cloth, and coachman's wig and court livery, that's, thirty-five and two thirty-seven, and I forgot the new barouche and Edith's horse and her habit and the rent of the house in Belgrave Square and the linkmen and the pew in church and Constance's masters and the Opera box on the grand tier and the hall porter and the bouquets and the Greenwich dinners and the charity sermons. Five thousand pounds has all this cost, if it cost a penny ; and you ask why we didn't come to London all these four years since we left Ernsford Court and my dear father died, and we've been spending all but two thousand a year on improving and rebuilding and furnishing and pulling down and building up and altering and laying out grounds and building farm-houses and being High Sheriff one year and draining the land and building a new



park wall, and paying off *your* old mortgage (all out of the income) and enlarging the gardens and building pineries and graperies and what not and law expenses and architects and builders and carpenters and bricklayers and plumbers and glaziers and stone-masons and decorators and painters and upholsterers and Gillow's bill and the new Chancel——"

And Mr. Grahame never more fee'd the guard to give them a "compartment to themselves."

Yet both were worthy people, ignorant of their own and each other's worth, and possessing more good instincts than they knew how to make practical use of.

Both had been unfortunately circumstanced.

Mr. Grahame, after losing his mother when he was an infant, had gone, from the house of an invalid father, late to school, early into the army; remaining in each just

long enough to learn idleness—not long enough to unlearn it. At the age of twenty-one he took possession of his paternal acres, which were neither large enough to force him into county interests nor small enough to necessitate a profession. Finding the country, as in truth it is, ill adapted for the study of doing nothing, and meeting with no inducement to rummage for his higher instincts, he settled down to the occupation of a club-lounger, which occupation he followed successfully for fifteen years, at the end of which time he married Miss Mogg: whom he might have rendered happy, had he married her twelve years sooner or lived a different life intermediately. She was then attractive, attractable and open to development: attractive by reason of an indefinable sexual prettiness that mental cultivation and heart-expansion might have long retained—attractable by her woman's instincts craving for that

sympathy without equivalent, which not one woman in ten thousand finds — open to development, because her heart was in the right place and her intelligence strong enough to get the better of several potent defects natural and educational. Unfortunately, she did as hundreds do every year—she married a man whose affections had decayed without ever ripening; and the evils resulting from such a union were not less disastrous for being prosaic, gradual and preceded. Her affections, not driven back, but civilly stopped by a *vis inertiae*, became lost by absorption into other interests; her intelligence, which had *never* had direction or vent, narrowed itself into a groove filled with petty cares and miserable gossip; her prettiness went with the hopes which had created it; her defects and her jowl widened steadily.

Insomuch that, a few years after their marriage, she might be described as being

unamusingly vulgar, worldly without tact, stingily purse-proud, gossip-loving without the power of gossip-making, sack-shaped, large-jowled, coarse-skinned, and otherwise repulsive. And by that time her husband was beginning to suspect that his career had been a mistake, and to wonder whether he were not even then capable of something better than the *vis inertiae*.

Thus Mr. Grahame having, albeit without malice prepense, been the original aggrieved, and Mrs. Grahame the aggrieved, the general result was strictly consistent with precedent and with justice: the aggrieved grew fat and callous — the aggrieved dyspeptical and sensitive: the aggrieved advanced — the aggrieved went back.

Truly Mr. Grahame might now be said to have the worst of it.

And so he appeared to think; for he opposed nothing to the argument con-

tained in his wife's bill of costs. She paused for breath and a reply; but obtaining only the first, said —

“Four thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence three-farthings, exactly, has it cost over and above what it would have cost to have remained at Moorfield, and for the last four years we have been living on two thousand a year, and spending the rest in making the place; and then you ask, Why couldn't we have come to town all the time? and you your ownself didn't wish it either: oh! and I forgot Isidore and the satin shoe man and the Almacks' tickets and the forage being dearer in London and the fancy Bazaar for christianising the Papists and treating Spuckers to the play ——”

“Hm, hm, hm! God bless me! I didn't want all that:” said Mr. Grahame, taking up the *Times*.

The irritating subject being finally dropped, Mrs. Grahame, who inherited some of the persevering energy that had made her father's fortune, proceeded to comfort herself in the future: she little thought that every puff of the engine was bringing her nearer to a worse difficulty than she had yet encountered.

The last two miles of their way from the station was by the parish road which Constance had crossed at a quarter before seven o'clock in the morning, on that day three and a half months ago. Just as they passed the meadow with the white gate, a horseman issued from the farm-yard on the other side. The meeting might be accidental — Mrs. Grahame was "sure she didn't know or care whether it was or not;" but it was suspicious, and gave rise to some domestic excitement after their arrival at Moorfield.

An aggressive sunshine, glaring for

the space of four hours through the window of a railway carriage, among crumbled sandwiches and bundles of cloaks, is a thing trying to the temper of more people than are at all aware of being so "servile to all the skyey influences;" and perhaps it served to fuel any little irritation that questions past, future and pending, might have caused to smoulder in the panting bosom of Mrs. Grahame; for when she found herself among her household gods at Moorfield, she (in domestic parlance) "burst out."

"Well, I *must* say, when you've had such opportunities, and you might if you pleased marry anybody, and those you might so easily and are such eligible matches are often in the county and must hear about it if you go on so, and *he* ought to be ashamed of himself to take advantage of being like a brother, and I don't believe a word, and I don't care whether he came

there by chance or not, but it's shameful!"

"God bless me! What's the matter now?" said Mr. Grahame, not quite comprehending the drift of this voluble address, but prepared to resist a repetition of the bill of costs.

"Why, what have I done, mamma?" said Edith, with a rapidity and sharpness of utterance that made every one start, herself included.

"Done enough, I should think! What are you staring at, Constance? What business have you with anything? — Done enough, when John and the coachman both must have seen how you coloured up, and how *he* stood there looking like a great fool, — and I'll never consent to it, never! And it's forward and improper, as well as ungrateful and everything else, and I'll leave everything away from you, I will, and I'll



turn him out of the house if he comes — *that* I will."

"I won't listen to this:" said Edith, walking out of the room, with a nervous step and a heightened colour.

Constance, having no business with anything, paused a second or two in doubt, and then followed her sister.

Mr. Grahame looked wistfully at the door, and walked towards the window, with his hands spread wide and deep in his pockets.

"Well, I'm sure," said Mrs. Grahame, "if she's to be allowed to go off in a pet in this sort of way, and make a fool of one ——"

"Hm, yes, well, awkward — Don't see my way out of it without a row:" remarked Mr. Grahame, in an angle of the window.

"I'll leave it away from her: she shan't have a penny!"

"But your father's will tied it up, don't you see? You can't ——"

"I don't care — what does *she* know about that? She thinks I can."

"But when she finds out that you've told her what's not true — eh?"

"Pack of nonsense! Besides, I'm sure Edith will never be happy without rank and position and all that. Mark my words, she won't."

"Are you sure that you have not brought her up so?"

"Or inherited her love of a fortune from *you*?"

"Hm, well, I don't see the joke. Come, now — if she really does like the boy, and all that sort of thing, you know — well, I don't see why not. He has a capital position in the county — a fine property, if those old mortgages were paid off — a beautiful place. And he's as good a fellow as ever stepped; and we know all about him; and

that's a great thing in these days, when one doesn't know who one's trusting one's daughter to — and all that, you see, — eh? And with her fortune that she will have, — why, really, upon my soul, you see, they like each other, and —— ”

“That's just the very reason why it's such a pity to throw away her advantages. It's too hard, and that's the truth. What's the good of a fortune to a man who doesn't care a straw about it? When many an earl would jump at it.”

“You think so much of coronets, that you altogether misunderstand and depreciate Edgar Ernsford's position in this county.”

“Well, if you are determined to throw her away, I wash my hands of the whole concern. You had better send for him, and beg him to accept her — throw her at him, in fact, — much better. I wash my hands of the whole business — quite. You

had much better do so — much. To go and throw her away on a man who has no more value for her fortune than nothing at all ! Why *you* thought something of it — I know that — more, a good deal, than you thought of me !”

“But you are finding fault with him for not doing what you are finding fault with me for having done.”

“I don’t care ; so you did.”

“Is it generous to rake up and exaggerate everything you can find or imagine against me ?”

“Well, I don’t mean anything unkind : how touchy you are ! of course I don’t ; and I dare say you were not a bit worse than other men ; and you were very handsome before you lost your complexion and grew bald. And what’s the use of making such a fuss about it, if I did say you did ?”

“Very well, I suppose not ; but ——”

"Do you mean to get rid of that young man or not?"

"What young man?"

"Why that cousin of yours, to be sure."

"If he meets with no more encouragement than you gave him to-day, when you bounced away from the carriage window and never spoke to him at all, I think you need have no fear about the matter."

"Pack of nonsense about encouragement! I'm sure Edith has given him plenty. It's most improper. I shall be ashamed to go about. It's most abominable and unwomanly; and it's not even commonly delicate; and Spuckers knows all about it; and so do all the servants, for anything I know; and how can you expect them to look up to one when ——"

"Know what? What's improper and unwomanly and indelicate? I've not the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"Why, what *should* it be but that morning?"

"What morning?"

"Oh, lord! Why that morning when she rode to Ernsford — the morning after they went to sketch."

"Who rode, and who sketched? I know nothing about it."

"Why, can't you understand (Spuckers has just told me all about it, thinking, like a great fool, that I wanted to encourage him, I suppose) — can't you understand that Edith and Constance drove over to Ernsford the day before we went to town?"

"I can understand it, now you tell me."

"Well, well — she went over, as she said, to finish a sketch of the gate-house for Lady Rosssden, which she never did; and I don't know, but I'm convinced she went on purpose to make him propose to her (so

dreadfully forward at her age, too; I'm sure I don't know where she got such manners from — not from me, certainly) and then Constance rode over there at seven o'clock the next morning, pretending to go for some drawing things she had left behind (but that was not true, for they were here all the time), but she's so obstinate and sly, it's no use to say anything to her; and I believe they're both in love with him, though Constance isn't grown up, and I told Edith so, upstairs, just now, to make her feel ashamed of it — but, on second thoughts, I am sorry I did, for perhaps it will only make her jealous."

"Good God! you didn't really ——"

"There, now, don't make a fuss about it. I'll make that all right. Besides, she isn't, and I only told *her* so in joke. But I'm afraid that Edith is — why, else, did she refuse Sir James Gorsecroft and Lord Hollingbourne? — both excellent matches, and

only that I hoped, and do hope still, when I've better opportunities than the bustle and confusion of a London season, for —don't you see?—for Lord Ravensdale——”

“It's no kindness to disguise the truth, when people are making themselves ridiculous by not seeing. You made yourself the laughing-stock of the few people we *did* know in London, by the way you ran after that *vaurien*. Whatever I was, I never was such a fellow as he is. I knew his father very well, and he was a very fine fellow; but his son is a bad lot altogether. You made yourself exceedingly ridiculous about him—every one noticed it at Lady Rossden's ball: it made me quite ashamed of myself.”

“Well, you must do as you like—and send for him, and ask, and beg, and pray, and entreat him to propose to her—and give Constance, as soon as she's out, to the



curate of the parish. Do it, now, pray do — I wish you to do so — I hope you will, *that* I do,—now pray do it at once; I've no more to say in the matter. But if my *dear, dear, dear* father could have foreseen that his fortune was only going to enrich another — a beggarly country squire — he would never have tied it up so, never! It's very hard, very hard, indeed, after he toiled, and toiled, and toiled, for years after he ought to have given up business—and all to make a great family—and my brother, who would have gone into Parliament, and been made a peer, if he had lived—and I, who ought to have married a lord, as I might have done, over and over and over again—and I sacrificed all my just ambition for you, Mr. Grahame; and you never cared for me. You only married me for my fortune, you know you did; and now you won't listen to a word I say—not a word; but you go and throw it away on an embarrassed country

squire, who doesn't even care about it. It's just what I might have expected, when I sacrificed myself so;—just! of course it is. Oh, if my *dear, dear, dear* father could rise from his grave and see how his child is treated! Constance, what are you prying into the room for? It's no concern of yours that you should come listening about. So sly! *I* know all about your ride to Ernsford, *I* can tell you. It's bad enough to be plain, without being sly, I'm sure. Go to your lessons, and try to learn something! But I forgot, you are turning into a blue-stocking, and know so much, forsooth. I suppose you think yourself much cleverer than Miss Donaldson!"

(*Exeunt* Mrs. Grahame and Constance by different doors.) Mr. Grahame *log.*,

" '—— Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas  
Immolat, ——' "

That's all the Latin I can muster from school. I'm blown up to appease the *manes*

of old Mogg, though I believe he would take my view of the case if he were alive; for he was 'a worthy old fellow, though he *did* think a little too much of his money ;—natural enough, too, perhaps, when a man has exclusively devoted great abilities and energy to make it. A worthy old fellow he was, and as shrewd as ever he could be. I know he would have seen it as I do. Anyhow, I can't see Edith sacrificed to a piece of swagger without having a fight for it. I hate a row; but hang it—ah, well, it's all my fault. I know that—my fault and my misfortune together. If I had been brought up at all—and had a chance, I shouldn't have turned idler about town at two-and-twenty;—such a life plays the devil with a fellow, and uses up his better feelings before they get a chance of showing themselves. Now, if I had cared about her properly, as I might have done (for there was no one else in the way, and she was

altogether different then — attractive and improveable, and all that), I should have been a happy man, and she \* \* \*. All this gives one a kind of disagreeable remorse, and makes one feel that one has wasted opportunities and injured \* \* \*. Well, well, Edgar hasn't done so, and won't. I think I once read somewhere, that somebody\* said, that when a man is conscious he does no good himself, the next thing is to cause others to do so. Whew! I wish my time could come over again. (*Exit Mr. Grahame.*)

\* Pope.

## CHAPTER X.

FROM the domestic storm at Moorfield arose a calm, unruffled and continuous. Ernsford, albeit Edith was not thrown at him, as recommended by Mrs. Grahame, received attractive encouragement. Mrs. Grahame's demonstration in the carriage was explained away, like a miracle in the hands of a speculative Churchman, till it lost all affinity with the original. The contract made in the old gallery was working on smoothly to its fulfilment ;

“ And all went merry as a marriage bell.”

In brief, the momentous question, “ Can't he feel to care for me ? ” was gradually nearing its definitive answer.

Mrs. Grahame made no sign against the turn of events ; something, perhaps reflection, appeared to have altered or modified her views. Was it an effort of her better nature, calling up out of neglected inheritances the self-gratifying benevolence that formed a conspicuous feature in the worthy character of old Mogg ?

Or was she resting wakefully on the principle, "*reculer pour mieux sauter*" ? The stay-at-home virtue, charity, inclines to the former hypothesis.

One afternoon, in the first days of August, Mr. Grahame, being out riding with his two daughters, and happening to pass through the meadows that lay between the green lane and the parish road, spoke as follows :—

"God bless me ! how hot it is here ! I shouldn't have come this way. You'd better keep your veil down, Edith—the sun's enough to blister one's face. Hm, ah !

well—I think we'd better canter on, and get out of this."

They did so, and issued from the farthest meadow just about the spot where Mrs. Grahame had "bounced away from the carriage window." They turned down the lane, for it was shady; turned into the Quarry Wood, for it was shadier; and finally turned into Ernsford Park, for it was both shady and good cantering ground.

Such good cantering, that the day being close as well as hot, their horses were in a muck, and Constance's pony fairly pumped by the time they pulled up to a walk about a hundred and fifty yards from the gatehouse. Mr. Grahame took off his hat, turned his horse's head towards the wind that was as much pumped out as the pony's, and said —

"God bless me! it's hotter than ever. Suppose we go in and get cool, and ask Mrs. Powell to get us a cup of tea—the sun will be lower in half-an-hour."

This fact being indisputable, they turned their horses' heads towards the gatehouse. Ernsford, happening to be in the avenue, caught sight of them from a distance ; but Edith and Constance had their veils down on account of the sun, and Mr. Grahame was short-sighted.

"Edith, you had better both of you go and see about the tea:" said Mr. Grahame, after they had dismounted. "Just go and look up Mrs. Powell. By the by, Constance, you'd better come and mind your pony till some one comes ; they'll be here in a moment — we had better have gone to the stables at once. God bless me ! how hot it is ! I think, perhaps, we *had* better take them to the stables."

To the stables went Mr. Grahame and Constance, missing Ernsford, who came home in the meantime. From the stables they proceeded to the house, where, after talking for nearly half-an-hour to the old



housekeeper, they joined Edith in the gallery.

She came forward to meet them—but not alone: a warm rose-tint bathed, rather than coloured, her cheeks.

Ernsford accompanied them on their drive home as far as the green lane; and Edith asked herself no more the question—  
“Can’t he feel to care for me?”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Mrs. Grahame to Lady RosSDen.*

“Moorfield, Aug. 3rd, 18—

“MY DEAR LADY ROSSDEN,

“I write just one line to say will you all come over to luncheon any day this week, as we start for Carlsbad next Tuesday, and cannot you all go there too? It is a charming place, every one says, and I am sure you would like it besides its being *such* a pleasure to us that you should be there. And now, my dear Lady RosSDen, I must tell you that my daughter Edith is going

to be married, she is engaged to Mr. Ernsford, and though we do not exactly approve of it, indeed *I* think it a *very* foolish affair, yet still there it is. But I will tell you all about it when we meet, and we start all of us together on Tuesday, and he goes with us and stays with us all the six weeks all but ten days that he must be back to arrange about his property for the settlements, it is sadly encumbered! But I do not mind that if my child is happy; and let us hope for the best, not that I approve! Hoping that you will all come on Thursday, believe me, my dear Lady Rossden,

“Yours sincerely,

“JEMIMA M. GRAHAME.

“P.S.—I forgot to add, if Sir John Campion is not yet gone to Ravensdale Castle we shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing him also.”

## CHAPTER XL.

### BÖSER GEIST.

“Wie anders, Gretchen, war dir’s,  
 Als du noch voll Unschuld  
 Hier zum Altar tratst  
 Aus dem vergriffnen Büchelchen  
 Gebete lalltest  
 Halb Kinderspiele  
 Halb Gott im Herzen!  
 Gretchen!”

\* \* \* \*

### GRETCHEN.

“Weh! Weh!  
 Wär’ ich der Gedanken los,  
 Die mir herüber und hinüber gehen  
 Wider mich!”

\* \* \* \*

### BÖSER GEIST.

“Ihr Antlitz wenden  
 Verklärte von dir ab.

Die Hände dir zu reichen  
Schauert's den Reinen.  
Weh!"

*Faust.*

THE scene changes to that large northern county half of whose area is computed to be capable of containing all the people born since the creation of man—supposing them to be “stood up properly” on their feet, with their thumbs in rear of the seams of their trowsers.

On one of a series of terraces, sloping down from a large castellated pile of buildings to a piece of water, and bounded on the right and left by a park and some woods, two shooting-jacketed gentlemen are walking. The one on the right is Sir John Campion—already introduced to the reader at Tedminster: the other is the Earl of Ravensdale, and owner of the castellated pile, terraces, woods, park, and, much more, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible, within a goodly circuit. A female

figure is seen to pass along a distant walk half hidden by trees. Sir John Campion looks up, and moves to windward of a cigarette that Lord Ravensdale has just lighted. They keep up a steady silence for ten minutes, when the latter opens the dialogue.

*Lord Ravensdale* (in an artificial monotone). "So he's a pattern young man, is he?—a young man of domestic tastes, that sings duets with his sister."

*Sir John Campion* (correctively). "He has none."

*Lord Ravensdale*. "I wish him joy. — If she's the sort of girl to stand that sort of man, all I can say is ——"

*Sir John Campion*. "You're altogether wrong in your notions of him. He was my fag at Eton, and I met him again the other day at Tedminster; in fact, I stayed a night at his house: so I know something about him, and I can tell you that he's a

good deal above the average of men in every way — and a devilish pleasant fellow too, though he goes into things rather more seriously than suits my philosophy.”

*Lord Ravensdale.* “A methodist, eh?”

*Sir John Champion.* “Nothing of the sort.”

*Lord Ravensdale.* “What they call an earnest man—a fellow that’s got an idea——”

*Sir John Champion.* “I tell you he’s nothing but a very handsome, gentleman-like fellow, with considerable abilities well-cultivated, very strong principles, which he acts up to, and a strong will, very much strengthened by training.”

*Lord Ravensdale.* “I don’t care a d—n for his abilities or his will. He hasn’t devil enough to get on with a girl of that stamp.”

*Sir John Champion.* “But I tell you they’re engaged, and went off all of them to Carlsbad ten days ago (Ernsford is back in

England on business), and they're to be married in February. Sevenoaks told me so in a letter I got by this morning's post. It's a pity that —" (looking towards the spot where the female figure had been seen) "it's a pity — what a terrible world this is! — By the by, are you going to buy that yacht, the 'Amethyst'?"

*Lord Ravensdale.* "I've been too hard hit this year: I can't afford it—you know that."

*Sir John Campion.* I didn't know quite to what extent, but I always said I was afraid, if you didn't mind. — I'm very sorry to hear it \* \* \* You came into it so clear, too — instead of coming into five thousand a year — and having to pay three in mortgages as I did. Well —

" 'Questo mondo è fatto a scale: "  
Chi le scende, e chi le sale.' "

Ernsford is the lucky man: he'll have, they say, funded property enough to clear off all the encumbrances on that fine property of

his. They say, in fact, that she will have at least two-thirds of her mother's large fortune. Mrs. Grahame had only one brother, and no sister; and when the brother died, two years ago, old Mogg left everything to her, with remainder to her daughters, to be divided in such portions as she should think fit.—And it seems that this one is the favourite—in fact, I heard, from pretty good authority, that Mrs. Grahame dislikes breaking the property, and as the other daughter will have her father's (about a thousand a year) she would have left it—*all eventually, and half down*—to *this* one, if she had been satisfied with the match. But the fact is, she's so mad for rank, that she undervalues Ernsford's position; she would have done anything—given anything for a title. Now, if you had been free, it would have been the saving of you—set you straight with your experience and a wife as beautiful as a houri—a thing altogether



*de luxe* with such a fortune as hers. Well! that can't be done. Perhaps, if you were to live quietly for a couple of years, you might fetch things round. Suppose you keep away from London, shut up this place, and stay at the shooting-box on the moors for a couple of years, eh? it's really worth while — I see no other way of your getting round."

Lord Ravensdale takes an unwarrantably strong pull at the cigarette, which, in revenge, consumes in the same ratio, and burns his mouth. Sir John Campion continues:

"I dare say you might cut out Ernsford—I don't say that you couldn't. There *may* be some truth in what you say of her—that she's a sort of girl likely to be taken by a man of a different stamp from him—a man who wouldn't let her get weary from feeling too certain of him (*aside*,—but would train her to one of the

forms of devil-worship) — I dare say you might ——”

*Lord Ravensdale* (with unnatural bluntness). “So I will — who’s to prevent me? What’s the use of talking about putting up on the moors for two years?”

*Sir John Campion* (in a mildly persuasive tone). “No, my dear fellow, you can’t — it’s impossible.”

*Lord Ravensdale* (with a countenance gloomily anticipative). “Go on! go on! go on!”

*Sir John Campion*. “Why, don’t you see — it would be a very strong case towards Miss Grahame — just at first, especially. And the other ——”

*Lord Ravensdale*. “Oh, go on! go on!”

*Sir John Campion*. “I’ve nothing further to say. If Miss Grahame had been two years older, and had come out before you saw  
\* \* \* why then — Well, ‘it’s an ill wind

that blows no one any good.' I'm glad of Ernsford's good fortune ; and he has more need of it, too, than you have ; for his uncle and grandfather encumbered the property very much — his uncle especially. And if you would do as he has been doing ever since he came of age, you would bring things round in a couple of years — (*half aside*) — Curious ! the third generation, without a direct heir to this fine place and property. The long and short of it is, that you might very likely succeed with Miss Grahame if you tried ; but — ” (the female figure again appears among the distant trees) “ there is an impediment that you can't get over. When are you going to sell your racing stud ? ”

*Lord Ravensdale.* “ Ah, well ! perhaps. I've got to see a man on business at eleven ; and it's ten minutes past now. I shall be free at two. If you like to ride, why suppose you try the new chestnut mare

that I bought of Sevenoaks's friend, down there, at what do you call the place?" (*Exit. Manet Sir John Campion.*)

It is not known whether Sir John Campion rode the chestnut mare that morning; but his first movement was to saunter reflectively in the direction of the distant walk among the trees — a movement which gradually lessened the distance between himself and the female figure already noticed. At a point where the principal walk was crossed by a path leading through a thick plantation, he stopped a moment or two, and, seeming to hesitate carelessly, as one hesitates when two roads with equal claims offer themselves during a constitutional walk, turned down the latter. Within a hundred yards of the turning-point, the female figure met him suddenly, having come upon the thickly-wooded path from another and similar wood-track, that crossed

it just ahead of the spot where he actually was.

*"Improbe amor, quid non mortalia pectora cogis ?"*

said Sir John to himself, walking on with his eyes fixed abstractedly on the ground, till he almost touched the female figure.

His feet crossed the shadow of a woman's dress. He looked up; and his countenance changed to an expression nearer resembling timidity than could have been previously imaginable there. The lady inclined her head in a manner that would have been haughty had it been less sad. Sir John took off his hat, and passed on.

The reader may recollect that, on the morning after the Tedminster ball, Constance Grahame began to tell her sister a fragment of a story which neither she, nor the child-authority from whom she derived it, were supposed to know. The lady to

whom Sir John bowed so deferentially in the plantation walk was the subject of that story — a very old and frequent one, infinitely variable in detail. Some particulars of that story have been indicated, as above referred to; a few words will finish them.

The lady was not a “dame aux camélias” making sickly sentiment out of shameless debauchery, nor was she one of the fashionable English Aspasia, who bid fair to attract the rising generation from all untainted female society.

She was the only child of a Florentine mother. Her father she had never seen. Of her own birth she knew nothing but the one fact which brought filial love to bear upon her early impressions of that fact. Having remarkable abilities, which had been cultivated as much as her mother’s income, derived from harp and Italian lessons, would allow — some English lady-pupil

had recommended her as governess to Lady Roslden.

The sequel has been indicated ; but there are one or two details which charity requires to be produced. Soon after coming to England she lost her mother, the only relation she had ever seen or heard of. Utterly unsophisticated, the idea of guarding against Lord Ravensdale's attentions never occurred to her, till the hour when she first crossed his threshold, and asked herself, with a sudden pang of terror and remorse — "How and what am I in this house ?"

Lord Ravensdale was one of those men, animally strong and morally weak, who obtain hero-worship for a pseudo-power that half-a-dozen black doses would annihilate, and all the while are steadily deteriorating by imitation. But spurious productions are often impossible to detect at first ; and Lord Ravensdale had in him

sufficient elements of beauty to awaken the full power of a virgin heart.

How evil counsels induced delay—how delay deadened the impulse of reparation—how the absorbing love of a passionate and isolated woman made and renewed excuses for the wrongs she suffered— all this is a story so old, that no conceivable novelty of detail can renovate it. All, therefore, that remains necessarily to be told is, that she was a gloriously beautiful creation—one of those splendid developments scarcely ever seen out of Italy, and very rarely in it. Such was Caterina Guarini.



## CHAPTER XII.

IGNORANT of her hypothetical rivalry, Edith Grahame was enjoying her pre-nuptial honeymoon at Carlsbad. Had Ernsford been a Frenchman, he would have said, with the lover in the "*Marquis de Pontanges*,"—"Que l'amour vous sied bien, Madame!" But being an English country squire, he conveyed the same idea in other words, as he lifted his betrothed off her horse, ten days or so after her arrival.

To conceive the existence of a fact more self-evident would overtax imagination. A soft warmth of colouring peculiar to the gentle, unapprehensive emotions of prosperous first love, bathed her cheek in a

rosy atmosphere of its own—giving and receiving beauty. Her eyes, of richest blue fringe-shadowed into violet, shone gently lambent, passionately serene.

As she sprang to the ground, a life-warm lock of hair, loosened from its careless fastening, fell in a golden wave over Ernford's shoulder. He dwelt upon the moment, and a shiver of delight passed through him.

"Edith! you never looked so lovely as now;" he said, bending over the golden tress, and speaking in a low voice of intensest emotion: "I never felt the reality of happiness as now—not even that day in the gallery. Edith, I am inconceivably happy."

\* \* \* \* \*

It may easily be doubted whether the whole pre-nuptial party echoed Ernford's last recorded words.

Mrs. Grahame was pleased at finding a goodly array of congregated titles; but the

pleasure was neutralised by the disappointment which it served to recall so vividly to her mind. What was the use of all those three princes, two dukes, ten counts, one English marquis, a duke's eldest son, four earls, and five viscounts, all in love with Edith, when she had engaged herself in England to the squire of the next parish?

Mr. Grahame, not having been abroad before, was rather amused at the novelty of the scene; but he could get no dry sherry; and the horse that the courier had hired for him to ride had an upright shoulder.

Constance was very much interested in all she saw, and proceeded, as well as she could, with her self-education; but she was the object of attack whenever Mrs. Grahame wanted a *sfogo*—a want which the mental juxtaposition of Ernsford and the princes rendered very frequent. Moreover, the cause which had produced in her such unlooked-for and premature development had ceased

to exist; and her self-education began to fall back to a slow and uncertain pace—sometimes going half a step backwards. In sooth, when she rode to Ernsford Court at seven o'clock in the morning, her actual condition was that of a hedgerow after a few warm days in February.

Finally, Spuckers and the valet sorrowed for their beer.

Mrs. Grahame was puzzled at finding that her letters of introduction, whose probable efficacy she had measured by that of the £4985 19s. 7½d., expended at 180, Belgrave Square, produced at Carlsbad a large assortment of princes and princesses, grafs and gräfins, and super-induced young Englishmen, coroneted and otherwise, whom she had failed of attracting to any one of her two balls, one concert, and six dinners, in London. She considered the matter over in a business-like manner, but was fairly puzzled; for the letters of introduction were

written by Lady Rosssen; and, moreover, the eligible young Englishmen were the same that she, Lady Rosssen, had invited for her in London unsuccessfully.

After much reflection, conducted by considerable shrewdness, she had worked out the Belgrave Square problem, and arrived at a threefold conclusion; first, that money alone was insufficient for her intended purpose, by reason of the slowness of its action; secondly, that personal attractions were the sure and only means of quickening that action; thirdly, that a woman cannot attract by proxy, even though the proxy be her own daughter. This she had found—not, perhaps, to her own satisfaction, but certainly to her conviction; yet now she found herself the centre of a brilliant circle, though she was quite sure that her own attractions had not increased since the month of July. She could not understand it; and confessed the same inadvertently to Spuckers,

who, being an old servant, and one of a class now well nigh extinct, often spoke very shrewdly to the point in bad grammar, and now delivered her opinion as follows :

“ Well, ma’am, you see, I don’t know as I ought to know anything about it ; but the servants *will* talk, and they sees and hears a good deal, and the men, they hears the gentlefolks a-talking at dinner-time, and what not, and they said, saving your presence, that you wasn’t known, ma’am, in London ; and the great ladies and the gentlemen that go about to the great parties (they calls some of the gentlemen ‘ catches,’ and I suppose that means them as tries to catch the young ladies that have got money) they say, which I heard Captain Borrowmore’s man say, that they don’t take just at first to a lady as hasn’t been known in the world, unless it’s some one that knows how to manage ’em, and I don’t know how that’s done, neither, which I’m sure, ma’am, you’d

had ought to know, you that have learnt so much from all those masters ; and your poor dear father, that's dead and gone, and gave you all the advantages that money could buy, and you played so beautiful on the piano with Mr. Nocturne, and Miss Edithe, too, that's the elegantest pupil Miss Donaldson ever had, which she told me so her own'self. Well, I can't tell how it is—it's not likely that such as we should ; but there's a something — else the Countess of RosSDen, that's such a great lady, would have done it all at once, which she tried all she could, I know that—for the butler told me he heard her asking of them ——”

At this last reference, Mrs. Grahame swelled with indignation, even to the bursting of her stay-lace. Spuckers repaired the damage, and proceeded :

“ Yes, ma'am — he heard her ladyship asking of them. But another season, ma'am, when they begins to understand (for they

don't take it in all at once) they'll come fast enough, a-tumbling one over the other, and all the more because of this foreign place, though we gets only frogs to eat, and can't get a bit of good wholesome English meat nor English beer, nor a drop of tea; but the place is so much smaller, ma'am, that they hall knows everythink, and they've more time; they're not hurried so, a scampering all over the place at once, and enjoying nothink, as they do in London; and when they gets, saving your presence, ma'am, a letter from a lady like the Countess of Rossden, they begins to think; and when they knows, too, of Miss Edith ——"

The strain upon Mrs. Grahame's stay-lace here became excessive; but, being of sound manufacture, it resisted successfully. Spuckers continued:

"When they knows of Miss Edith, though it *is* too late for them, to be sure, and Miss Constance, that isn't out yet; but



there *is* people that say she'll be cleverer than her sister, and turn out beautiful, too, they do. Well, when they knows of everythink altogether, don't you see, ma'am, it makes them see more than ever they see before; and Miss Edith and them enjoys the place very much, they do; and I'm sure there's no nicer gentleman in the world than Mr. Ernsford, and they all say so."

"Spuckers, how can you be such a great fool! I've told you before that I don't want to hear your gossip:" said Mrs. Grahame, rising from her dressing-table, in wrath and rustling silk, full dressed for a party at the Princess Tztchczschtzkowzowowsky's.

Pre-festal family conversations are often instructive; let us, therefore, go before Mrs. Grahame into the drawing-room, where Constance is sitting before a small Greek grammar, teaching herself the verb *τύπτω*.

Enter Mrs. Grahame, smarting under

Spuckers's philosophy and hair-pins—the latter having been driven in sharply by a sudden toss of the head at the words, “He heard her ladyship asking of them.”

*Mrs. Grahame* (tossing her head, but mildly, as mindful of the pins). “So you’re determined to set up as a blue-stockings, and pretend to know all sorts of things that you’ve no business with? What’s this?” (reads the title)—“Greek! Hm—hm—hm (with a sudden burst of indignation), I wonder you’re not ashamed of yourself—when you wouldn’t and couldn’t learn anything with Miss Donaldson—to set to, ever since she left, and work as hard as you can;—so sly, too, as if I didn’t see through you, and know why you rode to Ernsford at seven o’clock in the morning, and pretended one thing and meant another; and because there are those that flatter you up, you think you know more than us all; but I can tell you you don’t, for all your conceit.”

*Constance* (rather doggedly). "Miss Donaldson taught me nothing at all—I have learnt twice as much since she left, as I did all the time she was with us."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "That's all your perverseness and ill-temper."

*Constance*. "I have done better since, because I have been assisted to help myself. Miss Donaldson taught me nothing—nothing at all—much less than nothing—a great deal less than nothing."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "And who helped you, pray?"

*Constance*. "The masters I had in London—and Edgar, too, helped me immensely in the fortnight we were at home."

*Mrs. Grahame* (sarcastically): "I thought so."

*Constance* (not understanding the allusion). "I don't pretend to be anything. I thought that I should like to be able some day to read some of the beautiful things

that are written in Greek; and so I thought I would try to learn a little, as well as I could, when I had time. I told Edgar so, and he gave me this grammar."

*Mrs. Grahame* (half aside). "The great fool! I wish he had you to manage!"

*Enter Edith*, warm-tinted, and lifeful—luxuriant tresses of hair flowing from under a chaplet of white roses, in two waves of gold.

*Enter Mr. Grahame*, erect, flat, and invariable in the narrow circumference of his white waistcoat; the hair of his head iron-grey, bald on the top, and brushed tightly forward from a division at the back; that of his face is told off into a pair of short cutlet-shaped whiskers trained outwards, and a pair of small, thick moustaches, scissored off in a line with the lips, like the hay and straw in a chaff-cutter. *Mr. Grahame* sees the pin-scars showing through the strained back-hair of his wife

in small red streaks: he scratches his right whisker silently. Edith bends over her bouquet, and looks absorbed. Constance reverts to the verb *τύπτω*. The evening is intensely hot, which causes the pin-scars to smart continuously: and the smart of the pin-scars is circumstantially suggestive of the offending words, "He heard her Ladyship asking of them." Mrs. Grahame feels an intense longing to box their ears all round; but comforts herself by the reflection that next season she will be in a position to cut the "slapping fine woman." She scans Edith critically from head to foot, and opens the conversation.

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Hm, yes: that's a very becoming wreath—but the berthe falls a little too much this way—there, that's it: (arranging the berthe) that will just do. How well you look to-night! (heaves a stiff sigh, and pauses as though gathering strength for a struggle). "I think you

might wear that dress, with different trimmings and the other wreath, at Lady Sandown's on Thursday."

*Edith* (bending over her bouquet). "Edgar is going back to-morrow."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "And what of that, pray? What of that?"

*Edith*. "Why, of course, I can't go there."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "And pray why not?"

*Edith*. "Why, because I can't."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "And pray why can't you?"

*Edith*. "Why, because it is impossible."

*Mrs. Grahame*. "And pray why is it impossible?"

*Edith*. "Why, because it is."

*Mr. Grahame* (having ascertained that the carriage is at the door). "Well, don't you see — you forget that when people are engaged, they don't generally go out at all; and when Edgar is gone, don't you see, why it would never do."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I don't see it at all."

*Mr. Grahame.* "When Lady Charlotte Perrington married——"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "And what's that to me? She's no rule for me. She does as she thinks proper. I'm not going to be told what is right by anybody. I'm sure she was no use to us in London."

*Mr. Grahame.* "Surely she was. You expect impossibilities. I know that she took a great deal of trouble. Besides all the introductions here, it was she who introduced ——"

Voice of Spuckers on the staircase. "I heard her ladyship asking of them."

*Mrs. Grahame* (throwing wide the half-open door, feeling that this is too much). "What do you mean by your impertinence? I'll turn you away without any character at all, and tell everybody how impertinent you are."

*Spuckers* (perspiring freely with astonishment and the heat of the evening). "Lor,

ma'am, I beg your pardon, I'm sure ; but I wasn't a doing nothink. It was only the courier and me a talking on the landing. And he says to me, are your gentlefolks a going to Lady Sandown's? And I said; of course they are, which I heard her ladyship asking of them when she called here yesterday."

*Mrs. Grahame* (to Spuckers). " Well, of course, that was what you meant—now don't make such a chattering again close to the door. You needn't get the dresses ready, though, to-morrow, unless I tell you ; for I don't think I shall go, it's so hot. (*Exit Spuckers.*) Well, you must do as you like, Edith. Some day you'll repent not having listened to me. It's all very well to feel so vastly unworldly just now. Just wait a little and see.—Well, I must tell Lady Sandown to-night ; but it will disappoint everybody sadly—you don't know what a sensation you've made here. And it's



Prince Terracina's last evening here, and he's the best waltzer in Europe. And Lord Portpatrick, and Lord Ferrybridge, and Baron von Grüneberg, and Count Schönbeck—all came up to me last night, at Madame von Ruschendorf's, and begged so hard that I would take you. But what can I do?" (*Enter Ernsford.*) "You're just come in time, Edgar, to settle this question; and I'm sure you'll agree with me."

(Ernsford looks as if his convictions were the other way; but prepares himself to listen steadily. Mrs. Grahame continues:) "I am sure you will agree with me, there can be no other way of looking at it,—in fact, I don't know that it's worth debating about, I'm sure. We were only talking about Lady Sandown's ball the day after to-morrow; and I was saying that, of course, Edith ought just to show herself there, after all the civilities they have shown us ever since we came."

*Ernsford.* "I really don't know what is the etiquette: I suppose you had better do whatever is civil and courteous—I think, perhaps, Edith is the best judge of——"

*Mrs. Grahame* (quickly). "Exactly! I only want not to be uncivil. Come, Edith, the carriage has been waiting ever so long."

*Exeunt* Mr. and Mrs. Grahame, Edith and Ernsford. *Manent* Constance and the verb *τύπτω*.

The party at the Princess Tztchezschtzkowzowowsky's was as agreeable as a large average of agreeable people could make it. Whether Mrs. Grahame was surrounded by distinguished petitioners for her daughter's appearance at Lady Sandown's is not known; but our own correspondent observed that Count Schönbeck seemed to regard Ernsford in the light of a greedy monopolist.

The division of labour creates many occupations: that of Count Schönbeck was

fortune-hunting—the most laborious and worst paid of any, on the average. Now the fortune of an itinerant heiress is always magnified by report:

*“Mobilitate viget, viresque acquirit eundo.”*

And Miss Grahame's, having thus increased at the rate of a thousand pounds per mile, was a prize not to be turned aside from, albeit the wildest of forlorn hopes. Whence resulted, on the part of the Count, much grinning, and unwearied efforts to force his individuality upon her notice—or, in conversational idiom, to shove himself in: but, as an Irishman once said—failure crowned his efforts; and Ernsford kept undivided possession of her, without trouble or anxiety.

Nothing further is known respecting the events of that evening; but soon after daylight Mrs. Grahame awoke from a troubled sleep, during which Spuckers had sat upon

her, in the character of a nightmare, slowly and continuously repeating those words provocative of pin-scars—

“He heard her ladyship asking of them.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE following morning Ernsford started for England, on law business concerning his own broad lands relatively to his marriage —travelling night and day, in order to be back at Carlsbad within ten days or a fortnight if possible. On the evening of the fourth day he arrived at Ernsford Court, where his brother already was.

An old Italian proverb says "Fratelli, flagelli;" and the dictum would be corroborated by the experience of many a kind-hearted man who has diminished the balance in his banker's book by paying disgraceful debts for a scampish younger brother more deserving of being whipped

at a cart's tail. The expression may be strong; but if walls could speak and be examined by a French *juge d'instruction*, they would testify that "fast man" and *μαστιγίας* are convertible terms.

The sole object of which burst of virtuous indignation is, to show, in a roundabout way, what Rupert Ernsford was not, preparatory to showing what he was.

He was to that respectable corporate body, "other people," as one painted panel to another of a different wood—exteriorly similar; *i.e.* a public school and university education, a country life when at home, and a good deal of athletic intercourse with his compeers, had prevented his originality from showing on the surface; but if you scraped the panel, you would find the grain of the wood to be different from that of the other panels.

With apologies to all opponents of "mus-

cular Christianity," it must be confessed that he was open to the imputation of that heresy; for his limbs were those of an athlete, and "Saint Thomas Aquinas" was generally packed up in his portmanteau, inside a pair of boxing-gloves. Altogether, the shortest and most serviceable description of him required at the present moment is this: He was full of aspiration and purpose, ready to devote himself, enthusiastic, persistent, strong of will, largely gifted, both mentally, morally, and physically; moreover, he took trouble with himself sufficient to have self-mastered a dozen of his contemporaries, if they would or could have taken as much. On the other hand, his own power was, as yet, more than he could hold or guide: he felt and acknowledged himself to be yet unbroken. But he had one corrective advantage over his own contemporaries; if he was sometimes his own bad adviser, he was also the only one—none having any in-

fluence over him, except his brother. And this requires a paragraph to itself.

On coming of age, Edgar Ernsford had taken a peculiar position in consequence of peculiar circumstances. During a long minority under the nominal guardianship of a man intellectually and morally his inferior, he had unconsciously acquired an early habit of working out his own ideas with self-dependence — not in a spirit of contempt and insubordination, but thoughtfully, and from the perception that he was standing alone. From this it resulted, that Rupert, being appreciative and six years his junior, looked up to him with an instinctive exclusiveness which, when the latter came of age, and practically stood *in loco parentis*, became hero-worship and something more.

Hero-worship and something more — and that nameless something is so important — so distinctive, that it modifies the mean-



ing of the term itself, as frequently understood and applied. The feeling that so powerfully influenced him had no connection with that which deifies unhallowed force and canonises showy defects; it was brotherly love carried to its fullest extent—it was respect, as filial—it was confidence in a well-proved adviser—it was veneration for a man in whom were the elements of a saint.

It was little past sunset when Edgar drove through the archway of the old gate-house, where he was met by Rupert, who had been waiting about there nearly an hour, with an eager expectancy that the last two paragraphs explain.

“I can’t answer any questions now,” said Edgar, rising half asleep from the dinner-table. “I have not been in bed the last three nights, and hardly have had two hours’ sleep. Did you appoint Thompson?”

“To-morrow at ten—and the others as well.”

"Then I shall go to bed, for I'm fairly knocked up."

The next evening they had a quiet half-hour on the terrace, where the means of taking their likenesses presents itself conveniently.

Both have finely formed features and remarkable countenances; both are well made. The difference between them consists in degree, not in dissimilarity—a very strong family likeness being observable. Edgar is about five feet nine, or a little more; Rupert about an inch shorter, and somewhat more powerfully built, or rather, perhaps, more fully developed by rowing and an unbroken course of robust health. Both have the eyes, hair, and complexion generally represented by painters of the Venetian school; viz. hair dark-brown and gold-threaded; complexion quasi dark, with a light shining through it; eyes rich grey, with the faculty of darkening and

deepening occasionally. The youngest is the darker by a shade ; his general expression self-struggling ; his face yet hairless. The eldest has a slightly pointed beard : his countenance is indicative of self-mastery, hard struggled for without the dram-drinking support of pride.

Having described their outward appearance, similarities and differences, there seems nothing further to be done with them, except to let them speak for themselves, which they do as follows :

*Rupert.* " So you're going to marry Edith, after all ? "

*Edgar.* " What do you mean by ' after all ? ' "

*Rupert.* " Well, I was always afraid you would, somehow. "

*Edgar.* " Why afraid ? "

*Rupert.* " Well, it's no use talking about it now. "

*Edgar.* " But you have begun to do so. "

*Rupert.* "That's because I've no tact. I'm always causing you some annoyance or other, and have done so ever since I can remember. If I were good for anything——"

*Edgar.* "Nonsense! you've done nothing of the kind. If you make yourself out worse than you are, comparatively with other people, you will go near towards confusing practical right and wrong. Don't forget *that*, in steering away from self-sufficiency."

*Rupert.* "I don't compare myself with other people who have not had the chances that I have had. I can only compare my actual self with the self that ought to have grown out of those chances. Now look at the startling difference between us."

*Edgar.* "The difference between nineteen and twenty-five certainly is a startling difference, in respect of probable self-government."

*Rupert.* "You won't understand me!

I mean to say — look at the actual difference, and compare it with our respective chances. If *you* are six years older, *I* have had the benefit of your advice, which you received from nobody — the best and most practical advice, given with unequalled consideration and tact. I mean to say this, — that the fact of your having originated —— ”

*Edgar.* “ Not originated. Don’t turn heathen, and make a demigod of me.”

*Rupert.* “ I meant to say worked out. The fact of your having worked out, with no assistance from any one, all that I owe exclusively to you, counterbalances the difference of age, and proves that —— ”

*Edgar.* “ That I had no choice in the matter, but was forced, *nolens volens*, to think for myself. That’s all it proves. Now *do* let us each try to make the best of ourselves — there is no machine for measuring one’s neighbour’s trials and opportunities.

But tell me why you were always afraid that I should marry Edith?"

*Rupert.* "I hardly know why I thought so: I had a general impression that you would."

*Edgar.* But why were you *afraid* of it? What but the best motives should induce her to marry me? Consider candidly her advantages, compared with mine, and you will see that any other hypothesis is absurd."

*Rupert.* "I hear your argument, but I don't see it."

*Edgar.* "Why not?"

*Rupert.* "I don't know. . . . I was wrong. I said, truly enough, that I was always making some annoying blunder, and trying the wonderful command that you have over your temper. . . . Perhaps no one would satisfy me for you. But should you really have been much cut up if some one else married her—Ravensdale?"

*Edgar* (changing colour suddenly, and recovering himself more slowly than would

have been expected): "The fact is, my dear Rupert, that you don't quite know the sort of feeling one has on such a subject. You are both old and very young of your age. All your energy is at present absorbed by your intellect, your rowing and rackets, and your affection for me. By and by you will be able to appreciate the cheerfulness of the picture that your words suggested."

That same evening Mrs. Grahame was wishfully contemplating the beauty of the same picture, whilst on her way to Lady Sandown's ball; and Caterina Guarini was contemplating it, in an agony of hopeless grief, at Ravensdale Castle—because Lord Ravensdale was away, and she saw no one, and she filled up the blank hours with despairful visions; and the slapping fine woman was contemplating it hopefully, as a ladder whereby to mount out of her own set (she little thought what Mrs. Grahame had secretly determined respecting her); and

Lord Ravensdale himself was contemplating it with sullen self-dissatisfaction mixed with a discursive sort of pseudo-passion; as he entered the ball-room at Lady Sandown's—having arrived at Carlsbad the same afternoon.

Mrs. Grahame's maternal eye instantly recognised the object of her once ardent hopes; but she was not going to be in a hurry about noticing him or any of those dancing men like Count Schönbeck and all of them—they were all alike. She turned into an inner room, and said to Edith:—

“I want to pass through this way—it's not so crowded—and we can get to speak to Madame von Sonnenberg before you are besieged by all those men. Well, you won't be bothered in that way by Edgar—it's three days since you heard from him—but *les absents ont toujours tort*—I dare say he doesn't like your coming here to-night.”

Edith winced slightly at this view of the



case, but replied, "How very unfair, mamma—when he only started on Tuesday, and couldn't get to Ernsford till this morning!"

"As if he couldn't have put a dozen letters in the post on his way—what a fool you are!" answered Mrs. Grahame, with an irritating laugh.

Edith began to tug at the lace round her bouquet. Mrs. Grahame looked straight to her front, and said:

"There's that tiresome Count Schönbeck just in front of us again—and Madame von Sonnenberg told me this morning that Prince Terracina is going away to-morrow morning in despair because you are engaged—and Lord Portpatrick the same—but I ought not to tell you all these things now. By the by, I think I saw Lord Ravensdale in the room we've just left. I suppose he's come because of that beautiful Lady Isabella Stanford. I heard of that, and I saw him making himself very particular with her

just now. Well, my dear, you ought to feel obliged to him for being the only one of them who doesn't plague you with attentions. *He* certainly does not . . . *quite* the reverse—at any rate since the Tedminster ball; *quite* the reverse—ha! ha! ha!”

Edith gave a succession of tugs round the bouquet; for (confess it, oh, similarly circumstanced young ladies!) her mother's remarks were of a gently irritating nature, well calculated to rankle where they fell.

Towards the end of the evening, the insensible Earl came up to her and said,—

“How do you do, Miss Grahame? I fancied I saw you half-an-hour ago; but the room was so crowded that I lost sight of you again. It's a great pleasure to find you in Carlsbad. How long have you been here?”

Count Schönbeck, with whom Edith was dancing, betrayed an evident dislike to this interruption, which he viewed as an interference with his present privileges, and a

robbery of his legitimate opportunities ; but Lord Ravensdale went on, remorselessly disregarding the low buzz of impatience that formed a kind of pedal note to his address.

Edith balanced between a desire, on the one hand, of putting forth her power upon the contumacious man who had, as her mother said, singly withstood her attractions, and on the other, by a loudish whisper of conscience, which stood forth and forbade such an exercise of it. On the one hand, Edgar Ernsford and the painted glass in the old gallery of Ernsford rose up warm and vivid before her mind's eye ; on the other, the words, "Quite the reverse—ha ! ha ! ha !" rang in her ears with a scoffing, defiant sound, that was a very challenge to put forth her might. And thus she reasoned with herself thereupon.

"It's only this once—mamma was so provoking about it—it can do no harm to any one, for I know all about him, and I wouldn't

take him away from her for the world, even if I could, and were not engaged to dearest, dearest Edgar (there's no one like him in the whole world); and I *do* hope he's secretly married to her—I do, indeed, that I do—and I don't care for any one but Edgar, and never shall—that I shan't. I shouldn't mind if he knew it—he'd only be amused—I'll tell him, when he comes back, how I made him beg for a dance, like all the rest that I laugh at."

Whilst this mental soliloquy was going on, but at a much more rapid rate than would appear from its bulk on paper, a request to dance the next waltz with Lord Ravensdale was made and accepted—the Count's pedal note loudening the while steadily.

"One of the most agreeable men in London," remarked Edith, by way of commentary, as she and the Count moved away from Lord Ravensdale, preparatory to dancing; "one of the most agreeable, and handsomest, too."

She said this out of pure malice ; her mind was still smarting from the effects of the blister which her mother had applied to it. The Count buzzed and twirled his moustaches ; she repeated the statement.

"Ma foi ! je trouve qu'il a l'air très-bourgeois," muttered the Count, half aside.

"Yes, the handsomest and most agreeable man in London," repeated Edith, in a clear and communicative tone, just as they were beginning to dance.

The smart of the blister was by no means allayed when Lord Ravensdale came to claim his waltz ; and this she so evidenced in her manner towards him, as to leave it a matter of insolvable doubt whether she had repented of her resolution to "make him beg for a dance, like all the rest of them," or whether she thought with Piron—

. . . "à ce que j'en puis voir,  
La contrariété seul peut l'émouvoir."

And for the same reason, "our own correspondent" felt the same doubts respecting Lord Ravensdale.

As soon as the waltz was over, Edith, by a kind of restive movement much used by young ladies desirous of returning to their chaperones, caused Lord Ravensdale to bring her back to Mrs. Grahame, whom she forthwith informed of her perfect readiness to go home.

"Very well, my dear," said Mrs. Grahame, rising from her seat, with a beaming countenance.

"I must ask you to introduce me to your future son-in-law," said Lord Ravensdale to Mrs. Grahame. "By the by, my friend Campion was at school with him, and——"

"He is now in England—we expect him in a few days," remarked Edith, looking coldly towards the door, and smoothing her dress.

"May I have the pleasure of calling?" said Lord Ravensdale, with courteous carelessness of manner, as they turned to leave the room, and he to talk to some one else.

"Oh, that's really impossible to say: we're so very uncertain.—I am out all day here:" replied Edith, looking back rather than turning as she spoke.

"Then perhaps I shall have the pleasure of meeting you out walking or riding," urged Lord Ravensdale, in a tone rather more indicative of the intended civility than of any desire on the subject.

"We shall meet to-morrow night at Madame von Sonnenberg's," said Mrs. Grahame. "Good night! Come, Edith; the carriage is waiting."

As soon as the carriage-door was shut, Edith began tugging at the lace round her bouquet with a force that proved fatal to its existence.

"I won't go again, mamma; I wonder you

can ask me," said she, in a trembling, half-sobbing voice, that showed an amount of excitement hardly warranted by the occasion.

"Very well, my dear," replied Mrs. Grahame, mildly. "Of course you can do as you like. I only wanted not to disappoint a person who has been so very kind ever since we have been here; and I was going to have added that you needn't dance. In fact, I should suppose that Edgar will disapprove of your doing so at all any more. But if you really object to going, why—let us say no more about it."

That night Mrs. Grahame dreamed that she was standing in the dining-room at No. 180, Belgrave Square, amid a heap of bills, empty champagne-bottles and coachmen's wigs. And the chandelier gradually changed its form, till it became an earl's coronet; and she tried to reach it with a long broom; and the long broom gradually changed its form, and became like a crou-



pier's stick ; and every time she tried to hook it, the slapping fine woman, grown into a giantess, came between her and the light, whilst Spuckers whispered in her ear, "He heard her ladyship asking of them." And before she could finish her dream, Spuckers really came into the room, —not to repeat the odious intelligence that produced the pin-scars, but to tell her that it was time to get up.

Edith had no dream ; only once, in the middle of the night, she woke, fancying that she heard a voice close to her pillow, saying, "Quite the reverse — ha ! ha ! ha !"

## CHAPTER XIV.

ON the following morning, at or about the time when Spuckers called Mrs. Grahame, Rupert Ernsford did the same office for his brother at Ernsford Court. The latter was in bed, and three parts asleep: the former walked across the polished oak boards in a pair of heavy boots, and opened the conversation.

*Rupert.* "How long do you think you'll be kept here?"

Edgar was still half dreaming of his last ride with Edith, and the golden lock of hair that fell waving over his shoulder as she dismounted; wherefore he roused himself at his brother's words, which were remindful of his return to Carlsbad and his

pre-nuptial honeymoon. He rubbed his eyes, and answered as briskly as a man just roused from sleep can answer—

“I see no reason why I should not be off on Monday. I can finish off everything by this evening.”

*Rupert.* “Well, God bless you, old fellow! God bless you in every way! Edith is the luckiest girl in the world; and if she’s worth anything—that is, I mean she will be the happiest woman in England, and ——”

*Enter* the old butler, with a can of water and some letters. Edgar broke the seal of one, reads it, and evidences disapproval thereof.

*Edgar.* “This is pleasant! Here’s Doddsfield got a lawsuit he’s solicitor for, that’s likely to go on for the next ten days; and he can’t come here till it’s over. It’s all very well; but I can’t stay for it. Well, I suppose I must stay” (goes on

reading). "After all, he's not sure that it will be so long. 'I *may* be able to get off by Wednesday.'"

*Rupert* (after a long pause). "I have been thinking over what you said last night about my being both old and very young of my age. It's perfectly true — curiously so — I know it; and yet it puzzles me, for I can recognise abstractedly the existence of a feeling with which I have no personal sympathy."

*Edgar*. "Mind that it doesn't come upon you some day unawares, in some unexpected and doubtful form, and run away with you."

*Rupert*. "I can answer for myself so far —"

*Edgar*. "I don't like lay-preaching or throwing stray texts about at hap-hazard; but I recommend you to bear in mind this one: 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' You're making

light of, and laughing at, edged tools—and you have not yet felt the edge. You don't know yourself yet. That which is dormant in you is as if it were not; and if you don't keep a look-out ahead, it may show itself unexpectedly in a way that may put you into a worse dilemma than you ever dreamed of. A man *may* come to grief through his higher instincts. *Verbunnsapienti*: but don't forget it, if you do not wish to be practically reminded of it some day. Now do, like a good fellow, write a line for me to Doddsfield, and beg him to contrive some means of preventing all this delay. Ask him if it can't be done in London; and stay a moment—send Thomas with it to Tedminster.”

*Rupert* (looking at his watch). “He'll be in time for the day-mail, if he starts in an hour's time. I'll write directly.—But haven't you got any other to go at the same time?”

*Edgar.* "No; I put my letter to Edith in the post last night."

*Rupert.* "Before I go, tell me, if you don't mind doing so—it's not idle curiosity—about Edith. When did it first come into your head? when did you——"

*Edgar* (after a pause). "Very well, I will tell you. It has been a part of me ever since I was twelve years old. It has grown, altered, and developed, *pari passu*, with my moral, physical, and intellectual self. The fear of losing her in the end has been the great grief of my life, and caused me nearly all the suffering which, perhaps more than anything else, tended to make me think early. Now do, like a good fellow, go and write to Doddsfield."

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days pass without any reply from Mr. Doddsfield. Whilst Edgar is breakfasting at Ernsford Court, Edith is similarly employed at Carlsbad. The letters are brought

in, which causes eyebrows to be arched and mouths to assume various expressions. Mrs. Grahame appears particularly pleased with hers, and reads out passages from it, indicating the omitted portions by a gentle buzz, as of a sleepy mosquito; so that the letter runs as follows:—

“Hm—m—m—m! ‘and we all so regret your absence, but I dare say it will be of great service to you and make you so strong. We all feel sure that all the foreigners must be over head and ears in love with dear Edith’ (I think indeed she *would* say so if she had been at Lady Sandown’s), ‘and I am sure Mr. Ernsford is a most fortunate man, and indeed he *deserv*’—Hm—m—m—m, ‘and I heard that she was talked about for Lord Ravensdale, a splendid match, if you had been ambitious’ (lowers her voice) — ‘they *do* say, *entre nous*, that he is gone to Carlsbad after her (crescendo)—Hm—m—m—m. ‘I hear

that Mr. Ernsford is to arrive to-day, so I suppose you will hear from him by the same post that brings this letter. Let me again congratulate—Hm—hm—m—‘Friday.’”

Mr. Grahame scratched his right whisker, as he was wont to do when domestically perplexed. Constance, being richer in resources, suggested that Edgar had probably arrived after post-time; but her mother thus rejected the hypothesis:—

“Why, you great fool, how could this letter have come?”

This remarkable *sequitur* passed unquestioned, and judgment went by default, as is generally the case in this world, when any one makes an uncharitable assertion in a loud, undoubting tone.

Breakfast and conversation progressed in an inverse ratio; insomuch that the latter languished even to extinction, till Mrs. Grahame gently revived it with words of pleasantness, thus:—



“I don’t know that one has any right to complain of him for not writing. I dare say he had business to do when he got home; and you know, my dear, you mustn’t expect him to be always thinking of you as he did at first; you mustn’t expect *that*, or you’ll be sadly disappointed after you are married. No doubt he wishes to begin as he means to go on. And you see, my love, now that he will be taking his proper position in the county, which he could not do hitherto, on account of the encumbrances on his property; you see, my love, he will be out a great deal, and you mustn’t expect all those little attentions that you have been receiving from him. No doubt he will live entirely at Ernsford, and manage his property, for he doesn’t care about London; and you know, my love, you mustn’t expect him to give up his habits; and you must remember that he is not obliged to go there for the House of

Commons or the House of Lords; not but that I dare say you will be very happy in your home, and you have made your own choice; and though I was once ambitious for you, and thought you eminently fitted for—for a different life, where you would be fêted and appreciated by all the talent and celebrity and power of the day, yet still, my love, I feel that happiness is everything, and I am sure, my love, I hope you have chosen for your own happiness—I hope and trust you have.”

This truly cheerful exordium was brought to a close by the entrance of Spuckers, who came for orders respecting a dress to be worn at a party the same evening.

“Well, I really don’t know,” said Mrs. Grahame, turning, as for information, to Edith. “It’s only a small party, to be sure; and the Gräfin is a very charming person; I’m sure I don’t know. Well, Spuckers, perhaps, then, you had better get

it ready; and if she feels inclined to go, she cap."

Edith looked pre-occupied and (saving her presence) not strictly in good-humour — a natural result, perhaps, of the above-quoted graphic and generally hopeful prospectus of her wedded life; but she did not forbid the trimming of the dress. Mrs. Grahame inquired a little farther.

"Well, my love, what do you think about it? Perhaps—if you think Edgar would disapprove—But you needn't dance—I don't like to advise ——"

"What's the use, mamma, of making so many words about it?" said Edith, somewhat suddenly, in a voice that trembled with some kind of emotion. "What's the use of saying so much about it, as if it signified whether I went, or not? I went to the other dance—and the music at Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins's—when I said I

wouldn't. Why should you suppose that I would not go now?"

In truth, nothing could be farther from Mrs. Grahame's ideas than such a supposition.

"Very well, Spuckers," said she, "I think that trimming will do admirably. And have you sent to order the horses for Mr. Grahame and Miss Constance?"

"Yes, 'm, and there was fine work to get one; and he couldn't get a horse at all, for the Griffin\* had ordered them all; but he's got a little pony for Miss Constance, which you said, 'm, that it was only to climb the hills on."

Mr. Grahame scratched his right whisker: the scratch was long, slow, and heavy, indicating resourceless perplexity.

"I don't think, somehow, that I said I would go there this morning," said he.

"I'm so sorry I misunderstood you," replied Mrs. Grahame; "but you talked about

\* Gräfin. — Ed.

it last night — and it's so difficult to get anything to ride here, unless one orders it some time beforehand, as you see. And, if you remember, you half promised Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins to take her this morning with you and Constance to that ruin up the hill ; and she has a pony that she hires by the week, and she's not strong enough for the riding parties and— Shall Spuckers counter-order the pony?"

Mr. Grahame resigned himself to the force of circumstances ; and three quarters of an hour later was on his way to the ruin, with Constance and Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins. He little thought what the Griffin was doing.

Neither did Ernsford, who was at that moment entertaining a proposal to stand for the county, on the retirement of one of the members then about to resign his seat.

" More people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows," remarked Ernsford, giving

the letter to Rupert. "I had no idea that they knew anything about me ; I have kept myself so much out of the way. It's very gratifying, however — very gratifying indeed, if it's anything more than the usual language for such addresses. I don't mean that they have any idea of humbugging ; but there's a certain form for these things."

"There's nothing of the kind:" said Rupert, emphatically, as soon as he had read the paper—"nothing of the kind. I mean to say that whatever the custom may be, as to the form of wording these things, signatures are not a part of that form ; and look at the number and importance of these. Just cast your eyes down the list."

"Yes, I see ;" said Edgar, looking excessively gratified—gratified as he only can look and feel who, for the first time, receives unexpectedly a spontaneous testimony of public confidence and respect from

a respectable and important body of his countrymen and neighbours.

"But what do you see?" asked Rupert.  
"Do you see what *I* see?"

"I can't tell, till I know what you do see:" replied Edgar, with mock cautiousness.

"What I see is this," said Rupert, getting up, and standing exactly in front of his brother: "what I see is this: that the men who signed that requisition (or whatever you call it) have had the penetration to discover that you possess qualities such as will confer distinction upon yourself, and do good service to the party——"

"I will never bind myself to go blindfold with a party:" observed Edgar, parenthetically.

"I know that," said Rupert, standing immovable before him, and, with a kind of unconscious theatricalism, pointing to the paper that lay on the table; "I know that; and when I say a party, I mean the country

—only you *must* go a little in a groove at elections and public meetings, and that sort of thing, you know. If you look all round, they will think that you are visionary or wavering.”

Edgar surveyed his brother with a sort of critical curiosity, and said :

“You are very shrewd—especially in everything that concerns my interests. You are so very mature in some respects, and yet so unfinished, that I sometimes think you are made in two pieces, one of which is finished off before the other is begun.”

“Well,” answered Rupert, “I sometimes think so myself. But I wish to repeat what I said: I wish to say that the men who signed that document know what they are about—that moreover it is headed by two of the shrewdest fellows in the county—that it has been done advisedly and with plenty of time for reflection, as you may see by the note that came with it—and



lastly, it has not been done from the want of an eligible man to choose from, seeing that I could name at least half-a-dozen men of property and influence, well known, accustomed to county business, and more or less popular, who are ready and most anxious to come forward, two of them being, moreover, men of decidedly good abilities — Sevenoaks especially — and I know he particularly wants to stand.”

“Well, I accept your auguries,” said Edgar, shaking his brother’s hand warmly. “I accept them, and without examination, solely on their authorship. But apart from ambition, or whatever is the right name for that desire of arriving at excellence which spurs men on to toil harder than galley-slaves, with constitutions broken, private affairs neglected, characters blackened, and every public and private action maligned,— apart from that thing, whatever be its name and moral value, I have another and far

stronger reason for entertaining the proposal contained in that document. On Edith's account I feel bound to do so."

Rupert's eyes darkened, and an uneasy impression came over his countenance. Edgar noticed and answered it.

"Don't mistake me," said he. "Don't mistake me or her. What I mean is this: My property will be relieved of its incumbrances by her fortune; and therefore I owe the exercise of every power depending on that property — not as a duty of affection to her own inner self, but as one of moral equity to her outer self, taken abstractedly."

This explanation was surely satisfactory; but Rupert's countenance did not brighten. He began one or two sentences, broke them off, and finally turned towards the door. As he was leaving the room Edgar said, half to himself —

“I shall ask for a fortnight to decide ; so that if the letter which I write to her to-day does not reach her before I arrive myself, I shall still be able to tell her about it before I give my final answer. It's only a matter of courtesy and feeling. I shall say that I am sure of doing it, but had rather not avow it publicly till I have told her.”

Meanwhile the Griffin was doing her best to reduce the number of issues in the matter, by doing away with Edith's interest therein. Whether this laudable effort was the result of sympathy with Mrs. Grahame's disappointment, or good wishes to Lord Ravensdale, or favouritism towards her own brother, Count Schönbeck, or a mistaken idea, or a confusion of ideas, or the absence of ideas, or a spirit of idleness, or a spirit of mischief, or a spirit of intrigue, — is a question on which “our own correspondent” was unin-

formed ; but the facts of the case are as follows :

Whilst Mr. Grahame, Constance, and Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, were slowly wending their way in the supposed direction of a hypothetical ruin — the road being treeless and very steep, the day intensely hot, and Mr. Grahame on foot — the Griffin was writing a note to Mrs. Grahame, in which she informed her of two facts : first, that she (the Griffin) had secured every unengaged horse and pony — as previously verified by Spuckers — secondly, that she had kept the best of them all for Edith, in hopes that she would join her riding party.

This note Mrs. Grahame received with various tokens of surprise, and handed it interrogatively, to her daughter. Edith read it, and handed it back across the table, keeping her hand upon it, but saying nothing. It was evidently becoming time for somebody to say something ; and each

thought so, but each, as if listening to a sermon, applied it to the other.

*Seniores priores*: thought Edith in English, resolving that the votes should not proceed after the manner of courts-martial.\* She gained her point. Mrs. Grahame looked from her to the note, from the note to the watch ; but meeting with no encouragement from either, placed her hand on the note, just by her daughter's, as though preparatory to a game known to all, or most of us, in our childhood, and called "pit-a-pat." Edith rose from the table, and began humming vaguely. The clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve. Mrs. Grahame got up and smoothed her dress carelessly.

"Well, my love," said she, "I don't know at all what you think of doing about it; but you really must let me send an

\* On a court-martial the vote of the junior member is given first — and so upwards.

answer to the Gräfin's note — it's not civil." \*

"Well, mamma, you had better answer it, I suppose."

"But what shall I say, my love?"

"Why, you arranged for me to go to Lady Sandown's, Madame von Sonnenberg's, and Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins's. Why need you hesitate now?"

"Well, my dear, I'm sure I'm very sorry if I acted contrary to your feelings in the matter. I wouldn't for worlds interfere between you and Edgar . . . and perhaps he might not like this to-day. I daresay, indeed, he will not approve of your riding at all after you are married — many husbands do not; and if so ——"

The remainder of this dialogue is unknown — not so its result. Within five minutes her riding-habit was brought out

\* Not the Gräfin's note, but the delay in answering it.—Ed.

by Spuckers; within an hour she was mounted and riding with the Griffin. The riding-party numbered fifteen or sixteen; and was further increased, soon after they had started, by the arrival of Lord Ravensdale, who cantered up and joined them.

"I thought you were not coming," said the Griffin, looking agreeably surprised.

"These women are too much for me," thought Lord Ravensdale. "I can't follow them at all — much too deep. Why, I told her I was coming; and she started half-an-hour before she told me she would. And Mrs. Grahame, too, told me she didn't know — and yet here's her daughter."

Lord Ravensdale was far from being slow of comprehension, but it was not likely that he was going to understand Mrs. Grahame and the Griffin — whether these worthy ladies were acting in concert, at cross purposes, in ignorance of each other's purposes, or with no purpose at all.

Count Schönbeck, who was steering a big horse as near to that of Edith as the menacing ears and heels of the latter would permit, cast reproachful eyes at the Griffin; his countenance became troubled; his nose pointed itself pugnaciously \* upwards; and, like the King of Lochlin, he "hummed a surly song." †

Nor, truth being spoken, was his apprehension careless on the ground of comparative personality.

The two men who now rode, respectively on the near and off sides of the beautiful co-heiress, were respectively in the position best and worst adapted to show them off to advantage. The Count was clever, well informed, and by far the most agreeable in conversation; but his knowledge of French, the neutral language, though sufficient for

\* This is not intended for a villanous pun; it is only a similitude drawn from "La grande armée."

† *Vide Ossian.*



ordinary small talk, was quite unequal to the requirements of the ideas he had to communicate; and Edith's knowledge of German, per Miss Donaldson, was pretty much confined to Schiller's ballads and Mendelssohn's two-part songs. Lord Ravensdale, on the contrary, had the incidental power derived from addressing her in a mutually native language; the incidental advantages derived from, and relieved by, the Count's incidental disadvantages; and all the thousand heightened advantages to be felt, but not explained, that a common birthland gives in conversation.

On the ground of exterior personality, the advantage balanced still more in favour of Lord Ravensdale. The Count was about five feet four, tub-shaped, and round-kneed, with a snub nose peering upwards out of a pair of clipped black moustaches; and he looked ill at ease, not to say absurd, on the top of a carriage-

horse nearly sixteen hands and a half ;— more especially as the said carriage-horse carried his head at right angles with his back, and propelled himself by a series of spasmodic scrapes, that raised the dust of the road and the curiosity of Lord Ravensdale.

The reverse of this describes Lord Ravensdale. He was nearly six feet in height, and spindle-shaped ; consequently, he was just the model for setting off nineteenth-century clothes. His face had a rich, warm tint, just saved from boyishness by what the French so vividly describe as "*les yeux fatigués*," which might result from feeling — only it did not : his manner was assured, but not impudent ; his countenance indicated a certain animal impatience, such as might well pass for sentiment in the imagination of a girl of seventeen. Finally, his hand and seat had been formed in the hunting-field ; so that he rode apparently

with a loose rein, and was as free for conversation as if sitting on a sofa.

The odds were too great. The Count felt that it was so, and he longed to exercise his dexterity upon Lord Ravensdale with a buttonless foil. Piteous were his reproachful glances at the Griffin—withering the looks of scorn and defiance that he hurled at Lord Ravensdale, whenever the big horse would allow him leisure to do so. In sober earnest, he considered himself wronged, deceived, betrayed; for, owing to some strange blunder or misapprehension, his mind had never taken in Ernsford's relation to Edith: seriously he thought that he had been robbed of a vested right which had become his by default.

Affairs being in the state above described, the Griffin's riding party proceeded onwards to some hill, valley or cascade and returned to Carlsbad, with no adventure worth naming. But soon after the cavalcade

left the town, a weary pedestrian and two ladies mounted on small ponies were visible in the distance, toiling up a steep hill. These were Mr. Grahame, Constance and Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, in search of the ruin.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Gelon, King of Syracuse, made peace with the Carthaginians, he stipulated that they should abjure sacrificing their children. Mr. Grahame tried to do likewise; but the clause was rejected. In plain terms, there was a row in the hostelry where the Grahames dwelt; and thus it was: At half-past three o'clock Mr. Grahame returned, with Constance and Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, to Carlsbad — having found his mistake, but not the ruin. Escorting to her house the latter, who looked very bluff, and seemed nowise grateful for the morning's amusement, he proceeded homewards with Constance. As he entered the *porte cochère*, hot, dusty and rather footsore,

nettled by the bluffness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, and suspicious of having been hoaxed, he saw issuing thence a cavalcade, consisting of one lady and about half-a-dozen men ; and immediately afterwards he found himself coming in contact with a big horse that appeared to be under discretionary orders.

"Where the d—l are you going to? What the deuce do *you* get outside a horse for?" said he gruffly.

"Comment, Monsieur!" objected a little black man from the top of the big horse. "Comment, diable, Monsieur! est-ce que vous voulez m'insulter?" At the same instant the big horse shied at a brass band in the street, and shoved Mr. Grahame against the wall.

"Get out of the way, you d—d little monkey!" roared he, fairly losing his temper. "Get out! or I'll see about you."

The rider still objecting to this mode of

address, Mr. Grahame *did* see about him, by applying his cane to the quarters of the big horse, who forthwith settled the question by setting off to the stables at a hard trot.

Three things are evident in this matter: 1st, the rider was Count Schönbeck; 2ndly, the Count, half-recognising Mr. Grahame, made no further inquiries; 3rdly, Mr. Grahame was of opinion that all foreigners were alike, and all pickpockets.

Asserting this last proposition intermittently on his way upstairs, he entered the drawing-room, where he found Edith in her riding habit, which showed every mark of recent work, and Mrs. Grahame smiling with controlled expansiveness.

"This, then," thought he, "is the English of it. This was why I have been sent trudging, for the last five hours, in the heat and dust, with Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins, who had nothing to say, and snubbed me all

the time for my pains! It's too much: I won't be played the fool with in this way. I won't stay any longer at any of your dirty German watering-places." He scratched his right whisker, but not as he was wont to do; the scratch was quick and nervous, and the sound stubbly.

In the meantime Edith had disappeared by another door, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Grahame to explain themselves in the following dialogue:—

*Mr. Grahame.* "And this is what I was sent off for, sweltering away after Mrs. What's-her-name and her pony! I see why I was shoved off to go looking about for a ruin that isn't anywhere at all! I won't stand it: hang me if I do!"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Well, I'm sure! and pray, may I ask what all this is about?"

*Mr. Grahame.* "About? The thing is—what has Edith been about?"



*Mrs. Grahame.* "Edith? Why, she has been having a very pleasant ride with the Gräfin von——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "D—l take the Gräfin! I tell you what: it's very wrong—very disgraceful, in Edgar's absence. And you knew it was, and Edith knew it was. Why was it kept secret till I was got out of the way? I hadn't been gone much more than an hour when I saw them all going along a road—I know now who they were, though I didn't catch sight of Edith. I know them by the way that infernal little foreign rascal rode—like an egg in a plate, and his hands up, as if he were picking his teeth. The fact is—she must have gone to dress just after I left the house; and you knew all about it when you sent me off to make an ass of myself."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "You had half promised her to go."

*Mr. Grahame.* "I don't remember any-

thing about doing so; and I believe it was all got up."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I don't know what's the matter with you. I only hope you made yourself more agreeable to Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins."

*Mr. Grahame.* "She was as bluff and disagreeable as she could be, at being sent off on such a fool's errand. She thought it was my fault, of course. I tell you she was as bluff as she could be!"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Now if you like to listen, I will tell you about the ride. About half-an-hour after you left, the Gräfin wrote me a note to say that she was going out riding, and hoped Edith would come—which she did as quickly as she could get her habit on, for I thought it would be a nice thing for her. I never could dream of all these objections to it. Ask Spuckers, who gave me the note."

*Mr. Grahame* (looking doggedly incon-  
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vincible) "I know this: Spuckers told us, while we were at breakfast, that the Gräfin had engaged nearly every horse and pony in the place. And I know the English of the thing—and it's this: the Gräfin, as she calls herself, wants to get hold of Edith for her brother, Count What-d'ye-call-him; and there he was, just now, coming out of the yard as I came in; and he ran blundering up against me; and I fetched either him or his horse such a lick, that I saw no more of either of them."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Good gracious! Why, they say he's a duellist, and——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "Fiddlededee! He's a fortune-hunter—that's what he is—and that's why Edith was asked to ride with his sister."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "But, good heavens! he knows, and she knows, that Edith is engaged——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "Not a bit of it—those foreigners have no idea of anything."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "Surely they can't be such fools! If I had thought of that, I wouldn't have let her promise to——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "Why, you haven't gone and——"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "The Gräfin begged so hard for to-morrow that I——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "Well, if you've promised there it is; but I can't stand it—I won't stay here any longer, to be made a fool of, when it's within a week of the 1st of September. I shall go off home to-morrow morning, and tell Edgar he'd better come and see about it himself—it's his affair."

*Mrs. Grahame.* "I am sure I wish Edgar *would* come and take things upon himself. It's very hard to know what to do. The people only wish to be friendly—and one doesn't like to appear ungracious—and Edgar didn't object, when he was here. If you remember, he and Edith joined one of

the Gräfin's riding parties one day — and if you didn't ride with her to-day, it was only because the party was got up yesterday evening, and she forgot to write me word of it till this morning. Here's her note" (producing it). "You see she says, at the end of it, that the Baron von Platschfusz would give up his horse to you. But, unluckily, you were already gone. I only hope he'll come at once; for I don't like the responsibility at all; and I almost doubt whether it would not be advisable to put a stop to all going out till he does come back—people *might* talk a good deal, to be sure; but it would be much easier work for me. I'm sure I wish I knew how to act for the best. I suppose he'll be back within a couple of days now—at least that's what he said, and he hasn't written to the contrary; so that I see no reason why you should not go back in time for your shooting, as you said just now. I'm sure I wish to arrange everything for

the best, and to do the best for everyone. It's very hard to be misunderstood so."

*Mr. Grahame.* "Hm, hm, hm,—well, I don't know. You'd better do the best you can. I suppose he will be here in a couple of days. I didn't mean to make a row about it; but it *was* riling to be sent trudging half the day——"

*Mrs. Grahame* (in a voice of sorrowful reproof) "How could I help your losing your way?"

*Mr. Grahame.* "True, to be sure. Well, but there I was, and there were all these people coming out of the yard, and that little snub-nosed rascal blundering up against me (I sent *him* about his business, though) and all that. Don't you see, eh? But you've no notion what fun it was to see the big 'bus-horse setting off at a hard trot to the stable, and the Count holding on by the pummel.—You're not annoyed, now, at what I said?"

*Mrs. Grahame.* "No; I have been accustomed to it too long. . . . But I can't forget that you have accused me of playing into the Gräfin's hands, to induce Edith to throw over Edgar for Count Schönbeck; that was what you said. But I've been too long accustomed to——"

*Mr. Grahame.* "Upon my soul, I'm very sorry, Jemima. I never meant anything of the sort at any time. God bless me, no! Never mind the first fortnight in September this year. They tell me the stubbles are not half clear yet; and we shall all be back in another three weeks. I'm sorry I annoyed you; I didn't mean it, I assure you."

*Mrs. Grahame* (with gentle decision) "No, my dear, I can't think of your losing your shooting; it wouldn't be right. We shall do very well, for we have an excellent courier, you know; and Edgar will be here in a couple of days."

*Mr. Grahame* (aside). "Deucedly thoughtful, though." (*To Mrs. Grahame*) "Really, it's very good of you, Jemima, to think of all this. . . . And I can't help feeling that I might have done better, and all that, long ago — God bless me, yes! And if my time were to come over again, and all that——"

*Mrs. Grahame*. "Never mind that now. All that is past and gone" (looks at her watch) "I had better send Pietro to see about your starting to-morrow morning. . . . And don't you think you had better take Constance with you? You will be very dull, if you are quite alone at Moorfield; and it's no use to her to stay here — only a disadvantage, in fact."

Mr. Grahame left the room, thoroughly ashamed of his suspicions, and half sorry for having sent the Count and his horse about their business. The only thing that



still rankled in his mind was the bluffness of Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins.

Mrs. Grahame went to Edith's room, whence proceeded the sound of Constance's voice in a tone that pleased her not; it was the tone that had vexed her ear when she passed in rustling silk by Edith's door at Moorfield, on the morning after the Tedminster Ball. Edith was examining a ball-dress that lay on the bed; her face was flushed, her countenance self-dissatisfied.

"I am doing no harm," said she, averting her face, half angrily, half fearfully, from Constance's eyes. "I am doing no harm, no harm at all. I am sure Edgar has no right to complain. I think more of him than he does of me; he has never written at all."

"It is untrue, every word that you are saying; and you know it is," interrupted Constance, with startling vehemence. "You know very well that Edgar was going to

travel night and day, that he might be back as soon as possible: you know very well, for I heard him tell you, and saw him show it you in 'Bradshaw'—you know very well that he could not arrive at Ernsford before five o'clock. You know very well, for you have known it all your life, that the boy goes with the letters at four. You know very well, in fact, though you are trying to deceive yourself and me, that you could not possibly have received a letter from him yet."

She seized her sister's arm, and fairly dragged her to the light, fixing on her a look from which Edith cowered piteously.

"You know very well," she said, in a tone so unnaturally stern for her age that she herself shrank from the sound of it—"you know very well, Edith, that you are *not* thinking of him as you ought, as he deserves—ay, and deserves, as I believe, more than any man now living in this beautiful

world, that such as you would turn into a Pandemonium. You know this: you know that you are deserting him—throwing him over for Lord Ravensdale; and you would lie to me, to yourself, to Edgar, to God! Edith! Edith Grahame! once my loved sister, and now possessed by some spirit of evil—will you make me forget that you are my sister? Will you force me to loathe and despise you? Will you drive me to confuse right with wrong, and curse the day that I helped you to entrap an angel into your fiendish snares, that you might break his heart?"

"Break whose heart—you great fool?" said Mrs. Grahame, who had entered unobserved, and bore down upon them in wrath and rustling silk.

No appeal could stand against such an address to the appealer. Constance was vanquished by ridicule; and the devil rejoiced.

At ten o'clock the next morning Mr. Grahame and Constance started on their journey to England: at eleven Edith started on her second riding expedition with the Griffin: at daybreak on the following Saturday Ernsford started from Ernsford Court, on his journey back to Carlsbad.

In the next few days following Mr. Grahame's departure, Edith joined three of the Griffin's riding parties, at which Count Schönbeck and the big horse assisted; and she went to two dances, at the first of which she succeeded in making Lord Ravensdale "beg for a dance, just like all the rest of them."

The second dance took place on the following Tuesday, being a fortnight after Ernsford's departure for England, and the same day on which, according to the one letter that had been received from him, he might be expected to arrive back in Carls-

bad. This time Lord Ravensdale did not "beg for a dance, just like all the rest of them;" he avoided her—avoided her persistently and with intention.

Coquetry is a plant that sows itself in the shade, and germinates rapidly. Ten days before, Edith had said to herself self-apologetically, that she would once, and only once, attract Lord Ravensdale into the crowd of men who hung about her uncared for: now, having done so, and rather ostentatiously motioned him back from the barrier, she was pouting at his neglect, and, half listening to the voice of an evil spirit that mockingly parodied her own former words, and whispered at unguarded intervals: "Can't he feel to care for me because he has no chance?"

Count Schönbeck, who was more at home in a ball-room than on the top of the big horse, tried all he knew, to amuse and attract her: he might as well have attempted

to get the big horse over a hurdle. Prince Terracina, who had changed his mind, and remained at Carlsbad, waltzed on that evening with a perfection that would have fascinated Terpsichore: he might as well have been a hobbledehoy educated by a Presbyterian minister—Edith sat down during half the waltz, and bent over her bouquet. The Baron von Platschfusz, who had just published a Commentary, in forty-nine volumes folio, on Havercamp's "*Sylloge Scriptorum qui de linguæ Græcæ vera et recta pronuntiatione commentarios reliquerunt*," tried his considerable powers of conversation in English so grammatical that it might have served for Miss Donaldson to parse: he might as well have tried to make Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins listen to an archæological disquisition on the ruin whose real or supposed non-existence had caused her to be so bluff—Edith stood with eyes vaguely averted, answering in occasional

monosyllables, and continuously smoothing her dress.

One by one, or rather by threes and fours together, "all the rest of them" came up; and several were of the number of those contumacious men, of ball-room exclusiveness, who had excused themselves to Lady Rossden from going to Mrs. Grahame's ball in Belgrave Square—as verified by the butler, who "heard her Ladyship asking of them." She snubbed them all. Some she snubbed by refusing them in a manner that caused the cuticle of their heads to feel as if suddenly stung by gnats; others she snubbed by a slower but not less sure process—going through with the dance as though they were not. *Chi più, chi meno*—all were snubbed.

Mrs. Grahame looked straight to her front—her countenance shining and unruffled as the surface water of a well. Edith came back to her regularly after

each dance, and regularly looked at her expectantly as if for advice, which she as regularly did not get from her.

At length, towards the end of the evening—having snubbed the last man in the category of “all the rest of them,” and seeing the room begin to thin, she said: “I suppose we had better be going?”

“As soon as you like, my love:” answered Mrs. Grahame, preparing to move.

“In a minute or two, mamma—please don’t be in such a hurry—I want so to rest. I’ve not sat down this last hour.”

“Very well, my dear; but I thought you wished to go at once—that’s all.”

“So I do—I’m as tired as I can be. I’ve been so pestered to dance, and . . . It’s very odd of Lord Ravensdale to take no notice of one all the evening.”

Mrs. Graham gave a short, fat laugh half aside, and said nothing. Edith waited in vain for any further demonstration.



"You don't seem to think so, then?" said she, after fanning herself strongly for a few seconds.

"Well, my love, of course I don't," answered her mother, directing her attention from Edith to the dancers, as soon as she had answered the question.

"This is treating me like a child, to go on like that:" said Edith, half aside. "To go on like that—giving one such an answer, and then turning away—as much as to say I couldn't understand her if she said any more."

Her colour came and went; her fingers clutched the flowers on her dress with a little angry motion. Thus passed three or four minutes more, when she looked up and said:

"Of course you do, mamma—why, of course?"

"What do you mean, my dear? What are you referring to?" replied Mrs Graham,

looking round with an expression of blank inquiry.

"Why, what you said just now, of course."

"What I said just now, my love? What *do* you mean?"

"Why, yes,—when I said — about Lord Ravensdale, you know."

"And what did you say, my dear? I was watching Prince Terracina waltz — he dances so wonderfully, you know."

"How provoking you are, mamma! when you know all the time."       • • •

"My dearest Edith, how *can* I possibly know what is passing in your mind? I remember you said just now that you were tired, and that the people bored you; and I thought how lucky it was, because it showed that you didn't care about gaiety, and wouldn't think Ernsford Court dull to live at altogether, and ——"

"It wasn't that, at all; and you know better. It's very hard, when you know all the time."

"I wish, my love, you would give me a chance of understanding what you mean."

"Well, don't you remember I said just now, why did Lord Ravensdale behave so oddly to-night before every one? He has not been near me the whole evening. And I said I was surprised at it, of course—and you said, of course you were not."

"Very well, my dear, and what of that?"

"Why, it's so provoking of you not to see that it's so odd."

"My dear Edith, you are no longer a child; and you must know very well that other people have their feelings as well as you. I—I'd rather not say any more about it, if you please."

"Well, I think it's very unkind of you, that's all; very unkind, indeed!"

"I think it's much more unkind of you, Edith, to force me into saying what must be so exceedingly painful for me to say. It places me in a very awkward position—

very. You want me to do what would be excessively wrong under your present circumstances. I—I really can't do it."

"Really, mamma, it's too bad. I'll do something or other, if you don't tell me; *that* I will!"

"Thank goodness, Edgar comes back to-night or to-morrow morning. I think it exceedingly improper that you should take any notice now of what Lord Ravensdale does, or think anything at all about him: you ought to feel very glad that he has the propriety to keep away from you—it shows that he knows what's right, and has the courage to act up to it. I—I'm sure you must see the impropriety of asking me to say anything further on the subject."

"I declare, mamma, I'll ask him myself, if you don't tell me."

"My dear Edith, you don't know what you are talking about, or you wouldn't say so. You quite make me tremble to think

of such a thing; it's too shocking to think of. You would be horrified yourself if you knew ——"

"Then why don't you tell me? I declare I *will* ask him, if you don't—that I will, this very night, before we go home. You began telling me half an hour ago, and then broke off, as if I were a child. I declare I'll do something or other that you won't like, if you don't tell me at once."

"If you *will* be so obstinate about it, you must take the consequences, and hear what ought to be highly painful for you to hear—highly painful to a woman of any proper feeling—not that I mean to say it was your fault, or that you ever gave him any encouragement—I'm sure I hope you have not done so thoughtlessly since he came here—but, of course, such a thing must be highly painful to all your better feelings; and it was to save you from this that I thought it better to push off the question—and I think

so still. I—I wish you wouldn't ask me any more about it."

"Then he came to Carlsbad on purpose, as you read out in Mrs. Elmore's letter the other day, and stopped yourself in the middle?"

"If he did so, as—as they—if he did so, well, it was very wrong—of course it was: and he is now doing the only thing he can—and, I must say, it does credit to his principles, poor fellow! But we had really better be going at once; for he seems as if he were coming this way—and that wouldn't be at all advisable. Come along, my love, — now do come."

"Well, mamma, I am coming; don't I tell you so?"

They rose slowly, and moved likewise — towards the door; stopping a minute or two on their way thither, to make their bows to the hostess. While Mrs. Grahame was thus employed, a voice whispered in Edith's ear,

"I could not trust myself to come near you this evening; but I ought not to tell you so; I ought to have let you think me as capricious as I am unhappy. I only ask one thing of you — Will you ride with the Gräfin to-morrow? I shall leave Carlsbad the next morning. Why did no one tell me, before I came here, that it was too late?"

Lord Ravensdale turned round, and walked quickly back into the crowd. Edith took her mother's arm, and leant heavily on it.

"Come, mamma," she said, faintly, "I am very tired."

Without further delay or remark they left the room. As Edith was about getting into the carriage, which came up almost as soon as it was called, a young man, pale, dust-powdered, and travel-stained, stepped forward from the road. It was Edgar Ernsford, who had arrived half an hour before.

Her head became dizzy ; she hardly saw him after the first glance at his features, which looked ghastly pale as the moonlight fell full upon them. He took her hand—and started at the unusual touch. Edith saw no more ; but she felt he was there ; she recognised his voice, though it spoke in a strange tone.

“Is this the work of one fortnight ?” said Ernsford, as he handed her into the carriage.

The door was shut, and in another moment the carriage was rolling homewards.

What became of Ernsford that night no one knew, and it is more than probable that he himself did not remember distinctly ; but the sun had risen full two hours when he entered the hotel, pale, dust-powdered, and travel-stained, as when he had left the Eilwagen five hours before.



## CHAPTER XVI.

FULL two hours the sun had risen, and Edith was but just sinking into a sleep of torture — such sleep as falls heavily over the soul that has been unrighteously passion-tossed and gnawed by self-reproach — falls heavily over it when, from weariness, it has sunk into a state of powerless self-consciousness — falls over it as a leaden coffin-lid over a person in a waking trance. Till then she had not slept ; or, rather, she had passed the night in a half-waking dream, which had so entered into every tangible object around her, that waking reality certified the horrible misgivings of the dreaming brain.

In a tumult of contending and confused emotions, she had laid her head on the pillow; good and evil were interwoven; the right impulse and the wrong objects were clinging to each other. Her temples throbbed; the hot blood rushed like liquid fire through her veins; her head tossed from side to side, and found no rest; her beautiful form writhed as though struggling with some invisible foe—so that the bed-clothes were thrown from her in angular folds that stood stiff as they were made. A strange atmosphere seemed gradually to envelope her, so that she could not tell whether she was asleep or awake. She could move from side to side of the bed; she could sit up and turn her strained and burning eyeballs towards the familiar objects in the room; but these familiar objects changed their forms as she gazed at them. She grasped the pillow—and it seemed a skeleton hand pointing in mockery at her.

And then the whole room seemed to be gradually filling with skeleton hands that increased to myriads, whilst the room became larger and larger to receive them. And a voice whispered to her in each ear — the voice of Ernsford and the voice of Lord Ravensdale ; but the voice of Ernsford whispered the words that Lord Ravensdale had whispered as she was leaving the ball-room ; and the voice of Lord Ravensdale whispered the words that Ernsford had whispered as she was stepping into the carriage. And each of them seemed to stand before her ; but whichever she tried to look at changed into the other while she looked.

The two figures and the skeleton hand vanished suddenly, the voices ceased, the room seemed to melt away ; and then she thought that she was in a church, kneeling at the altar, by the side of Lord Ravensdale. And the altar vanished ; and the

church became a large hall ; and Lord Ravensdale stood beside her, looking and speaking like Edgar, till an invisible giant-hand lifted a veil that she had not seen before, but which entirely covered him ; and then she could not recognise him.

A black cloud passed before her ; and when it cleared away, Ernsford again appeared, pale and travel-stained as when he had handed her into the carriage an hour or two before ; and she heard him pronounce the words he had then said — “ Is this the work of one fortnight ? ” And an invisible chorus said, “ Is this the work of one fortnight ? Ha, ha, ha ! ” And the room shook, as though convulsed by some unseen power ; and then a number of spiritual forms appeared — some of them mocked, and others said, “ Is this the work of one fortnight ? Ha, ha, ha ! ” Others moaned, and said, “ Alas for the golden-haired beauty ! ” And the evil spirits said,

"Murderous beauty, thou art spell-bound, ha, ha, ha!" And the good spirits said, "Not yet art thou so — there is yet time. Hast thou no resource above?" She answered "I know of none." And all the spirits vanished; but she still heard a chorus of evil ones in the distance, that said, "Is this the work of one fortnight? Ha, ha, ha!"

The scene changed, and she thought she was in a burial vault, so large that the eye could not measure it; and before her, in an open coffin, was Ernsford. And she tried to approach him, but an unseen hand held her back, and said, "I know of none. Ha, ha, ha!"

The vault grew larger and larger; the earth that was over it seemed to open, and the walls to melt away. She thought she was in an immeasurable plain; and, a few yards from where she stood, there was a bright light; and the figure of Ernsford

was there; but where she stood it was dark — so dark that she could not see where she trod. And yet she felt that between him and her there was a horrible black abyss, towards which an invisible hand was slowly dragging her whilst the light as slowly receded. And Ernsford receded as slowly; and, as the light round him increased, he moved farther away, until at last he seemed but as a star that shone very far off. She struggled, but yet she felt that she *could* struggle more; and, whilst she was struggling, the spirits again came about her. The good spirits said, "Hast thou no resource above?" and the evil spirits said, "I know of none. Ha, ha, ha!" Then the invisible hand drew her over the brink, and plunged her into the black abyss.

Her own scream of horror awoke her.

The morning light shone upon a piteous spectacle — Edith starting up unreposed

and ghastly — her eyes colourless from terror, her hair falling over her shoulders in damp, clinging masses.

It was nine o'clock before she again awoke from the heavy sleep of reaction.

Such a night of sleeping unrest leaves traces that last through the morrow, even at the age of seventeen. Mrs. Grahame noticed them thus :

"My love, you look very tired. I begin to think that late hours don't agree with you ; and it's very lucky, as for the future you won't be in the way of such things. I am sorry you promised the Gräfin to ride — very sorry ; but you can't help it now. I'll send at once for a horse for Edgar."

Soon after ten Ernsford walked into the room, looking still paler than when he stood by the carriage steps, nine hours before. Edith was dressed in her riding habit. Mrs. Grahame pointed to it, and said :

"Oh, Edgar, I've sent for a horse for you. It was an old promise to ride with the Gräfin von Sonnenberg, as it's her last day — she leaves to-morrow morning. I wish I had known you would have been back in time."

Ernsford gave a quick, penetrating glance from one to the other, and made some neutral answer.

"I wish that tiresome courier would be quick," said Mrs. Graham. "Oh, here comes Spuckers."

"If you please, ma'am," said Spuckers, entering opportunely, "Jackimo has been; and he says the Griffin has ordered all the horses; but he doesn't know as the Gruff Moustrap wouldn't give up his, which it's got two broken knees."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Grahame; "it's the Graf von (I forget his name). He only arrived two or three days ago. I have no doubt you will be able to have his horse."

The result proved, that a pair of broken



knees, and a shoulder that promised a second pair of the same, were no serious obstacles in the eyes of the gruff moustrap ; for he appeared soon afterwards curvetting proudly at the head of the Griffin's cavalcade—Count Schönbeck bringing up the rear on the big horse, who, being stimulated by a self-acting pair of spurs, which gave him intermittent pricks at uncertain and unexpected moments, propelled himself in a manner that gave him every appearance of having been gingered — if that screw-renovating process be known to the horse-dealers of Carlsbad.

Another horseman (an Englishman, and a fox-hunter, by his seat) was riding to and fro, some two hundred yards off. Ernsford saw him, and paled almost to the hue of death. He walked up close to Edith, and said, in a low, firm, but unnatural voice, —

“Edith, do you expect Lord Ravensdale to join you presently ? ”

The colour rushed into her cheeks, and then sank to ashy paleness: tears of ambiguous meaning welled into her eyes.

"No: why do you suppose so?" said she, moving towards the door. "No — I don't understand — don't I say so? He's going away — if he's not gone already."

Ernsford gave her his arm downstairs, put her upon her horse, took off his hat to the Gräfin, and walked out into the country.

Two hours passed, and the riding party, on their return homewards, were nearing the town. The exercise and the beautiful scenery, the fresh air and the bright sunshine, seemed to have dispelled the heart-gloom which the preceding night had bequeathed memorially to the morning hours. But the dream was in fact fulfilling — Edith thought she saw in Lord Ravensdale all the qualities of Ernsford. In truth, she knew no other type of a

young man; and the earldom, with its concomitants, weighed heavily in the scale — heavier, perhaps, than anyone but a girl of seventeen, twin-circumstanced with her, could fairly estimate. God forbid that I should miserably attempt to explain away the great patent fact of individual responsibility! I only mean to say, that some cases look blacker than is their real colour by comparison with others.

Meanwhile Ernsford had walked on, with no definite object in doing so, and no definite plan of action. He walked on for about two hours, neither choosing nor noticing his road, but trying to explain away to himself the evidence of his own eyes, and dispute the reality of corroborative facts.

In turning at random from one road to another he had, by this time, taken one leading back to Carlsbad. That road was crossed by another, winding along

the hill, which rose abruptly on one side of it.

A multiplied sound of horses' hoofs in the distance startled and spell-bound him to the spot. The sounds approached nearer and nearer—the sound of horses' hoofs and the sound of voices. He stood rooted to the ground—his whole frame convulsed by the shock of contrary emotions, intermingled and warring together.

Something within—a physical sensation rather than a mental impression—seemed to warn him of an impending crisis, that he could neither face nor turn from.

Nearer and nearer the sounds approached—the sound of horses' hoofs and the sound of voices. The foremost riders of the cavalcade turned an angle of the road, a few feet from the bank where Ernsford stood. These were Lord Ravensdale and Edith Grahame, riding at least forty yards ahead of the rest. Neither saw him. Edith's eyes were

downcast and half averted; a hot flush of conscience-marred pleasure tinged her cheek with a colour that robbed it of its purity. Lord Ravensdale was bending over her, and speaking words of love, his face almost touching a fallen tress of hair — the same golden tress that had fallen over Ernsford's shoulder less than three weeks before.

A few seconds Ernsford stood stupefied and practically paralysed; then all the fiercer instincts, that had long been subject to his will, broke loose with an impetuosity that overmastered him.

His eyes darkened and dilated; his cheek paled horribly; every muscle swelled and stiffened. Momentarily beside himself, he rushed forwards towards Lord Ravensdale, uncontrollable as a bull wounded by a picador.

Lord Ravensdale was by this time a few yards ahead, and the rest of the party had turned the angle of the road; so that

Ernsford, in springing forward, nearly came in contact with one of the foremost horses, ridden by a French lady, who called out in a shrill monotone, "Mais, monsieur, c'est que vous n'êtes pas gentil !"

The angry remonstrance of the French lady produced an effect that no other conceivable occurrence could have produced ; it restored to Ernsford his self-control. Such is the dreadful magic of the ridiculous.

Before three o'clock the riding party had returned to Carlsbad, and Edith was awaiting the expected arrival of Ernsford. He did not come ; her anxiety was almost impossible to analyse ; at least, none but a woman twin-circumstanced could do so.

Hour after hour passed, and he neither came nor sent a message. The night shadows began to fall over the earth ; the dreadful dream came back to her memory, as an echo of the previous night ; its horrors hung over her like a black cloud-cur-

tain; and through the black cloud-curtain a ray of light came vividly, but its brightness was painful to look at — she hid her face from it; and she fell asleep, for she was weary — she fell asleep, and slept till morning.

And in the morning she was less weary than on the preceding morning; her untruth of word and deed oppressed her less painfully; the question of the good spirit waxed faint and unfrequent, till it was well nigh hushed.

Time passed, and, in passing, both increased and diminished her anxiety; increased it, by fear of evil accidents — diminished it, by habit of facing falsehood. Hour after hour of the second day passed by. Mrs. Grahame became terror-stricken, and sent to the hotel where he was staying. The answer returned was, that he had come in at midnight, but had not gone to bed, and had gone out again at six o'clock. To

record all the horrific visions and meaner considerations evoked by his non-appearance and its concomitant circumstances, would be a task, "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," for the picture is shadowed forth on the facts that surround it; the removal of the uncertainty is all that is necessary to refer to. At nine o'clock that evening Ernsford walked into the room.

He was pale, almost to the hue of death, but all trace of excitement was gone; his manner was horribly calm; so calm, that it deceived Mrs. Grahame, while it terrified her.

"Where have you been?" said she; "we were so frightened. I hope nothing was the matter."

"I had a great deal to think off; I have had no accident, thank you," he answered.

Mrs. Grahame began to say something else, stammered, fairly broke down in the sentence, and left the room. He walked



forwards towards the window, near which Edith was sitting. Her paleness almost equalled his; so that, when a ray of moonlight fell upon them, they seemed as though disinterred from a fresh grave. He came close to the sofa where she sat, and said in a low, but distinct voice,—

“Edith! I am here neither to make reproaches, nor to seek, by any means whatever, to recover the place that I no longer hold in your heart. At two o'clock yesterday I met you riding; you passed close to me. Do not force me to explain further; your own heart and your own conscience will spare me the recital. I come to set you free — to renounce the claims which are now a chain around you.”

His voice failed, and for some time he struggled ineffectually to keep his self-control. At length he took from his pocket an unsealed note, and, laying it on the table, said in an unsteady voice, “You will

see by that note that I release you from your engagement. I wrote it for you to show to your mother." He waited for a minute, as if half hoping for some reply ; but none came.

He turned, and left the room. When Mrs. Grahame came in, a few minutes afterwards, she found Edith curled up on the floor, and in a passion of weeping.

Ernsford went back to the hotel, and wrote the following letter :—

" DEAR \* \* \*

" I regret much having been till now unable to answer definitively the kind note you wrote ten days ago : I regret it the more because I am compelled to refuse the very flattering offer by which I have been honoured. I trust to you to express my sentiments to the kind friends who signed the address.

" Believe me, yours faithfully,

" EDGAR ERNSFORD."

The same night he left Carlsbad; but the strain on his self-control had been too great; when he arrived at Cologne, he was raving in a brain fever.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Οὐ γνῶμαν ἴσχεις ἐξ οἴων  
τὰ παρόντ' οἰκέας εἰς ἄρας  
ἐμπίπτεις οὕτως ἀικῶς.—*Electra*.

It would be a sad, and perhaps not very healthy employment to think how large a per-centage of the population may be roughly classed under two heads—those who have had opportunities and thrown them away, and those who have had none; but, be that as it may, we are now turning from a remarkable instance of the one to a remarkable instance of the other—from Edith Grahame to Caterina Guarini.

Three months had elapsed since Lord Ravensdale had left Ravensdale Castle, and ten weeks since he had written to her. The

state of her mind was pitiable—if the word sounds cold and patronising, it is not the fault of language, but of those whose cold hearts and ungrateful minds have associated pity with contempt—it was pitiable. There are plenty of words to express more strongly something else—no other to express the thing itself.

Two years she had lived at Ravensdale Castle, standing, as it were, at the brink of happiness, but only seeing it through a mist. Passion had been poisoned by remorse, and remorse rendered morbid by the answering question of despair: “How could I—how can I do otherwise?” She groped about in the dark for the counter-answer. To say without explanation that she was singularly ill-suited for the position she held, may perhaps seem like implying that it is the proper vocation of others—which Heaven forbid! But in truth she was so, both in a moral and a selfish sense;

morally, in respect of moral amelioration — selfishly, in respect of present enjoyment. Her higher instincts and general tone of mind forbade her to feel satisfied with her lot, while her affections forbade her to change it. Hence she was unceasingly tempest-tossed, and suffered acutely — how acutely any woman of high instincts and strong feeling may guess by the aid of a little imagination, with safety to the purity of her mind, and much advantage to her Christianity.

A great sorrow becomes small by position when followed by a greater. Before the suspicions and uncertainties of the last ten weeks, all the shame, remorse and heart-tumults of two years faded into shadow. Be it remembered that she loved Lord Ravensdale, worthy or unworthy, and that for ten weeks she had, in utter solitude, endured daily, from morning till night, the slow torture of hope deferred. In truth

her state was pitiable—there is no other word for it.

She was now, for the seventieth time at the same hour, looking down the avenue that led to the Castle. It was getting dark, and the eye could not distinguish objects far; but she heard the noise of carriage wheels, and her heart beat so violently that she could not hear the sound again for a few seconds. After a few moments of intense and breathless listening, she flew along the terrace, and, entering the house through a side door, reached the hall as the carriage drove up. The bell echoed through the hall with an impatient sound. She turned into the library to conceal from the servants the agitation that was increasing in spite of her efforts to control it. Presently she heard a step crossing the hall quickly, and coming towards the room where she was. She ran forward, and met at the doorway Sir John Campion.

She looked at him, half scornfully, half inquiringly; and said to herself, rather than to him,—

“Where is he?”

“He is not come:” answered Sir John, bowing very respectfully, and holding out his hand with deferential hesitation.

She withdrew hers with sudden vehemence; her cheek crimsoned, her eye flashed, she stamped her foot passionately on the floor.

“Then what do you come here for?” she said. “What business have you here? How dare you intrude upon me?”

“I beg your pardon, if I have offended you:” said Sir John, drawing back, respectfully.

“You do offend me by standing there. Go away—leave me! Do you think I am blind, that I should not see what is in your black heart? Why do you stand there, wicked hypocrite as you are, trying to hide



your evil designs by a parade of courtesy ? You think to win my confidence by pretended respect. You think *that* must succeed with one in my position ; but you are mistaken—I hate you ! You make a pretence of respect and consideration for me—but you are forcing me all the while, by your manner of acting, to tell you what is most odious and galling for me to say. You force me to tell you that I know your designs—that I have seen, for more than a year past, how you have been trying to . . . I hate you, I hate you ! Leave the house, or I leave it within half an hour !”

“I will do so,” said Sir John ; “I will leave you as soon as I have delivered a letter with which I was charged. I came here for that purpose—I am very sorry to have offended you in any way—I again apologise for having unintentionally done so.”

He took a letter from his pocket, and

gave it her, or rather she snatched it out of his hand, and retreated with it to the nearest window.

"It may seem strange," continued Sir John, "that it has been brought here by me, instead of coming by the post. I was asked to do so, and to receive any commands with which you might honour me. I am here to obey any orders you may honour me with—to serve you to the utmost of my power, or to leave you instantly."

"Not a word of this sentence was heard by Caterina: her whole soul was absorbed in the letter, which shook in her hands so that she read it with difficulty. For two or three minutes she said not a word: Sir John remained standing on the same spot. Caterina read the letter over again, examined the seal and the signature, and started up wildly.

"Lord Ravensdale never wrote this!—it's a forgery!—you have forged it:" she said,

holding up the letter to Sir John, and throwing the light of her flashing black eyes full upon him.

He looked humbled, but did not shrink from her gaze, and replied—

“Perhaps this will exonerate me from the suspicion.”

He took from his pocket a small parcel directed to her in Lord Ravensdale’s handwriting, bowed very deferentially, and left the room. She took no note of his departure, but tore open the parcel, with a sudden presentiment of its contents: it contained a long tress of her hair, cut off the day she first crossed the threshold of Ravensdale Castle. For the first time the thought flashed across her ominously that it had never been set.

She folded up the parcel, read the letter through once more, again examined the signature minutely, and left the room tearless. She went upstairs, and rapidly col-

lected all the jewels and valuable presents given her by Lord Ravensdale: these she threw into a large trunk which she locked, and taking a paintbrush and palette that she had been using an hour or two before, painted his name on it, with directions that it should be given to him. She opened a drawer in which were some things that had belonged to her mother. A single tear stole solitary and unacknowledged down her cheeks as she measured them with her eye, and, hastily choosing an old thumbed mis-sal, put it into the pocket of her dress. She turned away from the drawer without delay or hesitation, put on a bonnet and a thick winter cloak, and threw a large shawl over her arm. She walked quickly into the room where a child of a year old was sleeping, wrapped him gently in the shawl, and, descending the great staircase, as being less frequented, made for the terrace door, and passed out of the house.

At the end of the terrace she opened a wicket-gate into the park, and in two minutes more was in the avenue, and in pitch darkness.

Onward she went at a pace that astonished herself, and in a space of time hardly credible had passed out through the nearest lodge-gate. She turned off at random along the high road, and still passed on at the same rate, till, at about one hundred yards from the lodge, the sound of carriage wheels attracted her attention, and made her, without knowing why, turn off down a lane. The carriage stopped a few yards from the corner of the by-road: she saw some one get out and walk rapidly towards the spot where she was: she turned, and ran down the lane, without knowing whither it led. The lane was pitch dark and full of ruts, so that before she had gone many yards, she stumbled, and would have fallen, had she not been caught by the stranger who

had followed her from the carriage. The stranger gently lifted up the child, who had fallen when she stumbled. It turned out that he was not hurt; but before her fears respecting him could be quieted, they had reached the carriage. The stranger lifted him in, and laid him gently down on the seat: she followed in an agony of terror, and took him in her arms. The carriage then drove off, and by the light of a reading lamp she then discovered that the stranger was Sir John Campion.

She gave a wild shriek of horror, and opening the door, tried to throw herself and her child into the road along which the carriage rolled with a swaying pace. Sir John gently prevented her, and said in the same respectful tone as before:

“I only tried to save you from yourself — from the consequences of your despair. I foresaw that you would do something of this kind. I waited for you, and followed

you—keeping on the grass, that you might not hear the wheels.”

Caterina was now too much oppressed by fatigue and the overwhelming sense of present helplessness, to make any further resistance, either by word or act. She sat in a corner of the carriage, with her child in her arms, listening passively, from sheer want of power to turn her mind away.

“I knew that you would hate me more than ever for doing so,” continued Sir John; “and perhaps it is natural that you should. I only wish to explain to you what I really have done, and still more what I wish to do, if you will let me. You think that I was instrumental in inducing Lord Ravensdale to marry Miss Grahame. I fear that I was; but, upon my honour, unintentionally. I certainly told him that Ernsford was going to make a marriage which would remove all the encumbrances left by his uncle and grandfather on his

property; that he and the Grahames were at Carlsbad, and that he would be coming to England for a time, to settle his affairs before his marriage. I told him all this, which I had just read in a letter received the same morning; and considering the immense sums he had got rid of, on the turf and in other ways, it perhaps was a foolish thing for me to have done. But it was hardly credible that, possessing such a——”

A sudden movement of impatience, and a scornful flash of the dark eyes opposite, warned him to change the contemplated remainder of the sentence — which he did thus: “It was hardly credible that Ravensdale should make the attempt—still less that he should succeed; for Ernsford is a remarkably attractive man in every way; and Miss Grahame has known him well all her life. Everything has turned out in a manner that shakes one’s faith in every



thing and everybody. But all I can say is, that if I could have prevented it, I would ; for Ernsford is an old friend of mine, and I believe that it will go far to break his heart. The conclusion of all I have to say is this : I saw you rush out of the house, to wander unprotected, along the roads through a November night, without any project for the future, and, as I believe, from your state of mind, without money. It was impossible for me to see this and not try to assist you. I do so, though I know you hate me for it, and, I confess, not unnaturally. But you may judge me, perhaps, more favourably when I tell you the proposition I am going to make, which is this : You must not, you shall not, be thrown upon the world—you don't know what it is that you would encounter. I know, from your manner of leaving the house just now, that you would spurn the income which ——”

Another impatient movement and another

indignant flash of the dark-eyes opposite again warned him to tread lightly on dangerous ground.

"I foresaw all this," continued Sir John, "and I see but one way out of it, consistent with your own self-respect and the welfare of that interesting child. My half-sister, Lady Goodwin, though exceedingly narrow-minded and prejudiced beyond measure, is really a kind-hearted woman, and has considerable influence among a certain set of people."

"No! I say no!" interrupted Caterina, starting up from the corner of the carriage. "You are a bad man, and I don't believe a word you say. I will live by my own exertions; I can sing and paint."

"Yes," said Sir John, "and admirably you do both one and the other. But genius thrown headlong into the streets of London, without money or a roof over its head, sinks like a stone in that great whirl-

pool. You would be worse off than any Spitalfields weaver or sempstress. Now if you will live for a time with Lady Goodwin, you will not only have a home for yourself and your child (and *that* consideration, surely, *ought* to weigh with you), but you will be with a person whose name will be a shield to you, and who has the means of enabling you, by her recommendations, to do successfully what you would in vain try to do now. For the sake of your child then, let me do this. Give me the means of once acting rightly. I have many things to regret and be ashamed of: give me this privilege."

Caterina fixed her eyes upon him long and searchingly; then, bending over her sleeping child, said, "I have no other resource; it must be so."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A PHRENOLOGIST, describing one day the comforting properties of self-esteem, assured me, with the fervour of one personally acquainted with the fact, that it was like a great coat.

No doubt this idea was in the mind of Achilles, when he said to Agamemnon, "*ἀναιδείην ἐπιειμένε*,"— O clothed in impudence—as it was in Mrs. Grahame's, when she said "not at home," to the slapping fine woman for the third time in the week preceding Edith's wedding.

Ever since the public announcement of Edith's approaching marriage, the slapping fine woman had been indulging in a little fairy vision, in which Mrs. Grahame was

the beanstalk. Nothing, however, could be farther from Mrs. Grahame's intentions than to act the part of a ladder. She had succeeded by her own unassisted exertions, and looked upon those who had tried and failed pretty much as her father had been wont to look upon bankrupt firms. Perhaps she was, to a certain extent, right ; for the failure implies a trial, and the trial implies, in a certain sense, a fraudulent assumption of the uppermost seats in the synagogue. But how far she had a right to throw stones in that respect must be left to her conscience.

Mrs. Grahame had, in fact, shown remarkable strategical powers.

In the beginning of August Edith was engaged to Ernsford, to whom she had markedly shown her preference when she was hardly out of the school-room. Lord Ravensdale was far away, and had neither shown nor been shown any visible prefer-

ence. In the beginning of November her marriage with Lord Ravensdale was publicly given out.

But this was not all. She had managed it so well that the apparently inevitable scandal was avoided ; and the engagement with Ernsford passed off to the engagement with Lord Ravensdale as smoothly and imperceptibly as a dissolving view at the Polytechnic Institution.

It was true that Ernsford had nearly died of a brain fever, whilst half the county was indignant because, after virtually promising to stand, he had finally refused, without giving any reason for doing so. It was no less true that Caterina Guarini had, from the same cause, left Ravensdale Castle at night, with her child, and had not been heard of since, as far as any one knew — except Sir John Campion and Lady Goodwin ; but the hymeneal change had been effected

without any direct interference or advice or expression of opinion on the part of Mrs. Grahame. Edith had acted by her own unadvised will ; and the final catastrophe had been Ernsford's own act and deed.

Over and above all this, she had fairly beaten the Griffin in her own fatherland. The Griffin had made up the riding parties on purpose for her brother, Count Schönbeck ; and Mrs. Grahame had made use of them and her to serve a different and opposing end.

She was now, in the middle of February, making the final arrangements for the wedding, and noticing various indications of future triumphs for herself. Several people who had cut her last year, were now expansively warm in their manner towards her ; and she foresaw that, when next she should give a ball, Lady Rossden's butler would not be able to say " he heard her ladyship asking of them."

Reviewing the part played by Mr. Gra-  
hame in these proceedings, the rough out-  
line runs as follows :

He swore a good deal, and suspected a  
little, when the news of Ernsford's sudden  
departure from Carlsbad reached him,  
which it did in a field of mangold-wurzel,  
per one of the "guns"\* — to wit, the influ-  
ential constituent who had that morning  
received Ernsford's letter declining to stand  
for the county. He swore loud and strong,  
and threatened summary vengeance upon  
everybody, when, two months after, a con-  
jugal letter from Paris brought him the  
news of Edith's engagement to Lord Ra-  
vensdale, just as he was starting to cover.  
But before post-time he resigned himself to  
six conclusions :

\* Notice to non-sportsmen and others :

When an Englishman is out shooting, he, by a  
customary ellipsis, assumes the name of this weapon,  
and is called "a gun." Foreigners must be careful to  
distinguish between this and the term "great gun."



Firstly, that there was no doing anything with them.

Secondly, that he had been, perhaps, a good deal in fault himself, in one way and another.

Thirdly, that if his own time were to come over again, he should do better.

Fourthly, that it was a pity Ernsford could not stand for the county.

Fifthly, that Mrs. Grahame was a monstrous sharp woman.

Sixthly, that he had had a capital run.

Taking into consideration the idiosyncrasy of his wife, and the probable process of reflection in his mind, these six conclusions have a moral significance greater than he himself dreamed of when he gave them forth in verbal self-commune on his way home from hunting: they are an acknowledgment of the truth so often practically unrecognised —

*“Contra miglior voler voler mal pugna.”*

Mrs. Grahame's was the stronger nature; and Mr. Grahame felt it, though he swore in the mangold-wurzel field, and swore on his way to cover.

When Mrs. Grahame and Edith returned to England, in the month of January, he made no allusion whatever to the subject, and appeared to have forgotten every circumstance connected with Carlsbad, except the bluffness of Mrs. Plantagenet Bug-gins; but ever after, whenever the marriage was mentioned by any one, he sturdily asserted that he had never consented to it.

It was now the middle of February, and the day before the wedding. Mrs. Grahame had bought a house in Grosvenor Square and a large assortment of plush breeches and coachmen's wigs, insomuch that, had her dear brother lived to go into Parliament and be made a peer (vide Chap. IX.)

he could not have shone forth in more elaborate splendour.

The last week had, in fact, been a series of triumphs: the Dowager Lady Ravensdale had assured her that Constance would grow up even more attractive than her sister. Madame Jupe à la Malakoff, née Crinoline, had assured her that the trousseau was unrivalled: and she assured herself that she had gotten rid of the "slapping fine woman." So passed off the last pre-nuptial day.

The morning dawned—a prematurely genial February morning, cleared by a slight frost, and redolent of the month of April. Edith rose in her luxuriant beauty, fresh as on the morning after the Tedminster Ball, but not similarly so. A warm light played softly on her cheek; but it was not the same that tinged it when, standing by the painted window in the old gallery, she pledged her troth to Ernsford: it was not the same that tinged it when the golden

tress fell over his shoulder, as he lifted her from her horse: it was a deeper light—a light that made its colouring more rich and less pure: it was first seen on the day when she broke her troth to Ernsford and secretly gave it to Lord Ravensdale: it had enatmosphered her since.

She rose in her luxuriant beauty, and stood amid folded draperies of pure white—a life-picture rich in form and colour—a warm sentient being basking in unclouded enjoyment—a very model of a houri.

An hour passed, and a vague desire for something not represented by the objects around crept uncomfortably over her.

“It is because Constance has not been to see me yet,” she said to herself half audibly. “It’s very unkind of her . . . the last morning . . . very cruel. She has never been the same to me since . . . and now, on the last morning, she leaves

me altogether—she won't come near me.  
. . . I . . . I wish she would come."

A slight but continuous shiver passed through her: she turned at random and without object from one part of the room to the other; then sat down, and clasped the handle of a hair-brush with a cold damp touch. In less than half a minute she started up again, opened the door, and crossing the passage to a door nearly opposite, stood hesitatingly, with her hand on the handle of the door, and called out, in a plaintive voice:

"Constance, are you never coming? Don't you mean to come near me?"

No answer was given: she opened the door and went in: her sister was not there. She returned to her room, and tried in vain to dismiss the crowding memories of that Something not represented by the objects around.

Nine o'clock struck: in an hour the

hairdresser would come to put on her veil.

Edith got up, ran to her sister's room again, and returned as before, saying to herself audibly, as though answering some internal misgivings. "It's very unkind of her—very cruel . . . On the last morning . . . Very cruel."

A few minutes after nine, Constance came into the room: She kissed her sister's forehead kindly, but gravely and without demonstration.

"Is that all, Constance?" said Edith, in a deprecating tone, turning her face towards her sister, but involuntarily averting her eyes. "Won't you, this last, last morning, kiss me as you used . . . one of your old kisses . . . this last morning . . . dearest Constance . . . this last morning?"

Constance threw her arms round Edith's neck; then started back two or three paces, and fixed her eyes intently upon her.

Edith's eyes filled with tears; but she made no effort—her energy seemed lost or suspended, and all that she could say was:

“ You don't care about me any more—you have given me up entirely . . . It's all at an end . . . but you might have tried to pretend, if you didn't feel it . . . on the last morning . . . it would not have cost you much to make an effort for once and pretend that you cared about me . . . it would have been a great comfort to me.”

“ I was not aware that you were in want of any comfort that I could give you :” answered Constance in a melancholy but unyielding tone. “ You have my affection. What do you wish me to do ?”

“ To be as you used . . . to feel as you used :” said Edith, still averting her eyes.

Constance sat down beside her, looked into her eyes, so that she could no longer avert them, and said:

“ You wish me to be as I was before—to feel as I did before : how can I ? The feeling between us was one of perfect confidence and perfect sympathy ; how can it exist, therefore, when both are gone ? And can you honestly deny that both *are* gone—necessarily gone. Could they possibly survive the uprooting of everything on which they were founded ? Did you not at once cease to trust me, and make it impossible for me to trust you ? You implored me to assist you in guarding against losing Edgar through a misapprehension. I did so at my own sole risk. In August, you engaged yourself to him solemnly, and of your own free choice ; in September you threw him over for Lord Ravensdale, concealing all the while from me what you were doing. You withdrew your confidence from me, and deceived me ; you perjured yourself to Edgar, and broke his heart—for it *is* broken, though he is alive and



going about as before; you did all this without provocation or temptation, and whilst you were still vowing the contrary. And now you ask me to be and to feel as before—you ask that we should be to each other as we were before you wantonly deceived me when I was trusting you most. Edith! Edith! it cannot be! Accept what you have chosen, and begin anew to qualify yourself for the confidence of others; but do not ask me to be to you as I was before. I love you as my sister; I would do anything to serve you; but the confidence and sympathy that was between us from earliest childhood is gone.”

“Why did you not tell me all this before? It’s very hard, and I’m very miserable:” said Edith in a low, wailing voice.

“I did,” answered Constance. “I did,—and in far stronger language, at Carlsbad, the day before I left for Moorfield. I did so while you were yet only on the road to

falsehood—while you had yet deceived no one but yourself. I would have done so since : I have tried hard to do so. I have mourned and suffered for you ; and would have made any sacrifice to turn you from your purpose, even at the eleventh hour, rather than see you ruin your happiness, and frightfully burden your conscience by setting a seal upon your guilt, and making your perjury irrevocable. But you well know that you would not listen to me — that you avoided me—that you turned away from me—that you made a stranger of me. You yourself have for months withheld from me your confidence and sympathy ; you turned away from me whenever we chanced to be left alone in a room together ; you resented all reference to the past, all allusion to the subject. And now you ask me why I did not say all this before — now, on your wedding morning — now, when you are about to render irrevocable

the course you chose deliberately, and against my most earnest entreaties—now, within an hour and a half of the time when, kneeling at the altar, you will seal your solemn promise to one, and your solemn perjury to another—now, when the hairdresser is at the door to put on your veil, and the horses are being harnessed to the carriage that will take you to church.”

“It’s very hard, and I’m very miserable:” repeated Edith in a low, wailing voice. “I never knew till now how much I cared for Edgar. I can’t understand myself, or how I came to act as I have done. I seem to have been under a spell.”

“Yes, you were,” said Constance, in a melancholy tone: half relapsing, for a moment, into the state of despondency and mistrust from which Ernsford had roused her. “You were—you *are* under a spell as strong as ever was fabled; and I know how—I almost wish that I did not know——”

"My mother, you mean?" interrupted Edith, starting up from her chair with a sudden impulse, and, for the first time in the last five months, looking her sister in the face. "My mother!—it must have been her . . . . But it's very strange, for she never said anything to influence me; and yet I feel somehow as if she *had* influenced me. . . . It's very hard; and I'm very miserable."

"It is better not to think of what or who influenced you," answered Constance, rising, and looking at her watch significantly. "It is better not to think of what or who influenced you. It can do no good—but only harm; for it will make you throw the blame from yourself, upon another, whom you ought to respect. You have no right whatever to doubt that my mother acted conscientiously. If you acted under her influence, you cannot tell what influence and motives she was acting under."

You cannot even venture to say that she knew she was influencing you ; for if you could so deceive yourself, why could not she deceive herself ? Considering what her wishes had been for you, it is more than probable that she may have influenced you unknown to herself. But remember one thing : self-deception in this matter was excusable in my mother, *for she had pledged no vow that forbade her to admit insidious thoughts* disguised in harmless dresses ; but with you it was not so. When you allowed yourself to say, as you confessed to me, that you would make Lord Ravensdale beg for a dance like all the others, knowing why he had come to Carlsbad, you virtually turned aside from the straight road — you virtually broke your vow — you virtually opened the door to the influence you now complain of. The crime and the responsibility are yours — yours exclusively."

Edith burst into tears, and threw herself into her sister's arms, sobbing piteously. The clock struck a quarter to ten.

"It is—it is my fault. I know it is," said she. "I have deceived myself. I have never been really happy since. I love him—Edgar, and always shall. . . . It's very hard; and I'm very miserable."

"Rouse yourself, then, and act while there is time," said Constance, starting up suddenly, and disengaging Edith's arms from her own neck. "Rouse yourself, and act while there is time for you to throw the horrible burden from your conscience. I will stand by you. I will take upon myself any responsibility—any odium. I will see you through it. I feel within myself the power to overcome every difficulty for you—I will do it alone. Only tell me that you will not marry Lord Ravensdale, and I will take everything upon myself. I *will*—I *can* do so. I feel a power within me,

as if a guardian angel were supporting me."

Edith alternated piteously between horror of the portrait that Constance had placed before her eyes, and horror of such a desperate remedy as was suggested. She balanced from one fear to the other, trying vainly to escape from both. Time went on. Constance threw herself on her knees, and supplicated her to decide. The only words she could force from her were :

"I do—I always shall love him. I deceived myself; and I'm very miserable. It's very, very hard."

Constance started up wildly, and seized her arm with a grip many degrees beyond the natural strength of the fingers that gave it. Her voice vibrated through the room, as she said slowly and with clearly syllabled distinctness :

"For the last time, I am able to tell you that your fate is yet in your own power—

that it is for you to stand or fall by your own act. For the love of God, throw from your soul the horrible burden of a great crime, before it clings to you for ever."

"If I had one day more," said Edith, looking fearfully towards the door. "I shall never love any one but Edgar. I deceived myself. . . . It's very hard; and I'm very miserable."

The clock struck ten.

"Once more — there are steps on the stairs," pleaded Constance, trembling in every limb; "once more — only say the word; they are at the door . . . once more . . . they are knocking."

The last chance went by. Another step was heard; the door opened, and Mrs. Grahame entered, followed by the lady's-maid and the hairdresser.

Constance left the room, having barely sufficient time to prepare for the wedding.



Half an hour afterwards Edith appeared, dressed in her bridal clothes and radiant as ever.

The excitement of immediate preparation, the hum of busy voices round her, the new sensation of being veiled from head to foot, and then the quick passing and repassing of servants, the roll of carriages driving up to the door, and the encouraging voices of satisfied friends—all these diverting influences, following in quick succession, had so far pushed aside the vivid picture which Constance had held up before her, that she looked smiling, beautiful, radiant—I have not said happy.

There is nothing to describe in a wedding, except in dressmaking, sartorial and gastrological points of view; which, in avoidance of book-making, we will leave to professors of the same.

Edith had the usual number of bridesmaids, whatever that number may be,

The general arrangements were on a magnificent scale.

Sir John Campion was best man, and looked dissatisfied with every one, himself included.

Mr. Grahame said, "God bless you!" when Edith drove off from the door, but never said that he liked the marriage; and of this fact he periodically reminded his wife ever afterwards.

The number of guests at breakfast was considerable; and among them the *Morning Post* noticed the Princess Tcheychowzowsky, Baron von Platchfusz, and that fair but bluff lady, Mrs. Plantagenet Buggins.

The ceremony passed off as usual, except that the bride was beautiful. The dresses of the bride and bridesmaids looked very much like those seen at other weddings; the responses were made with the usual and significant indistinctness.

The ceremony was concluded — the register signed. Constance might have spared herself the labour and sorrow of that last and terrible pre-nuptial hour.

Lord Ravensdale's carriage drove up to the church door, and Edith got in, amid a suppressed murmur of admiration from an unusually large number of people crowding round.

She drove off in the might of her youth and beauty: the future seemed as smooth and easy as the motion of the well-hung carriage. Every one seemed to wish her God speed.

Thus she left the church door.

Smoothly and rapidly the carriage rolled onwards through Hanover Square and down Brook Street, till they came to the corner of Bond Street, when a sudden check threw Edith forward almost to the front window. Lord Ravensdale looked out to see what was the matter. Edith

saw him turn deadly pale, and throw himself back with a stifled groan into a corner of the carriage. Instinctively she looked out of the same window.

A young and beautiful woman — the most beautiful she ever remembered to have seen — was standing on the crossing, almost under the wheels of the carriage. She held by the hand a boy of about two years old; and her southern black eyes were fixed upon Edith with an expression that made her simultaneously shudder and grieve. The carriage drove on — but the impression of that scene remained indelibly fixed on Edith's mind. Lord Ravensdale's face was still turned away, and his countenance much agitated. Neither spoke.

Thus she arrived from church.

She shuddered when she went into her room to change her dress before going off. It recalled the scene that had taken place

in it but three hours since ; and now, when the diverting influence of excitement had partially, or at least temporarily, subsided, the wisdom of her sister's last advice sank into her mind with terrible distinctness.

“ Why is it that I see now so much more clearly what I ought to have done ? ” thought she, without putting the question into words.

Poor child ! Thousands like you have asked themselves the same question in bitterness of soul. Wisdom is a martyr, and approves herself most when spurned.

The same influences surrounded her now whilst dressing for the journey, as three hours before whilst dressing for the wedding ; but the effect of such influences was broken or suspended. Friendly faces were crowding about her ; every hopeful augury was assumed and rejoiced at by a friendly chorus. But the spell had lost its

power ; the kind words fell dead upon her ears ; the kind faces made no impression on her sight. She heard nothing but the words, " Throw from your soul the burden of a great crime, before it clings to you for ever." She saw nothing but the dreadful eyes of the strange woman.

" Well ! my love, I suppose you must be going," said Mrs. Grahame, when the toilet was completed. " God bless you, my love — Boo-hoo ! "

*Friendly chorus :* " Boo-hoo ! "

Edith looked piteously round the room, as if searching for a mind to lean upon. Her hands were cold as marble, and trembled so helplessly that she could hardly put on her gloves. She walked across the room to her sister, who was standing at the farther end alone, and absorbed in silent grief. She put her hand timidly on her shoulder, and said, in a faint voice,

"Constance, I must see you alone once more . . . . in your own room?"

Constance glided silently from the room: Edith followed, as helplessly as though obeying the signs of a mesmerist.

"Oh! Constance, Constance," she said, as she closed the door of her sister's room, "I am very miserable. How weak and wicked I have been — what injury I have done . . . . and not merely to Edgar . . . . I have seen her . . . . at the corner of Bond Street — the carriage was stopped, for we nearly ran over her. And she had a child with her, so like Lord Ravensdale. I am sure she's the same you heard of and told me of. She's beautiful — more beautiful than any one I ever saw; but her look at me made me shudder and pity her at the same time. I shall never forget it: her countenance haunts me, and will haunt me to my dying day . . . . And all this, or something else — perhaps it's because it's

too late, and there's no hope for me—brings back before me all I have lost . . . . and the horrid dream I had at Carlsbad—I never told you of it, because I was deceiving you and myself—the horrid dream about Edgar—I see it all before me now. Oh! God, what is to become of me? I never shall love any one but Edgar.”

She burst into a passionate flood of tears, and clung to her sister with the clutching tenacity of a drowning person. Constance's cheek was the colour of dew-damped marble, and every nerve quivered with agony. But she stood her ground; and gently but firmly unclasping Edith's arms, said:

“Edith, listen to me—you *must* listen to me. The time is past for questioning these things: it is now a sin to do so. You must bear your burden. Pray for strength to bear it, and you *will* bear it. Pray that the evil may be averted from all concerned



in the events of to-day—and it will be averted. To look back now is a sin—to despair is a sin. Remember the vows you have taken this day before God. Feel that you are individually responsible for yourself and for all who are in any way affected by the consequence of them. Pray for strength to feel and act up to this—and the future is yours. God bless you, dearest Edith!—God bless you, my darling sister!”

She imprinted a kiss on Edith's cheeks, opened the door wide, and almost pulling her from the room to the staircase, where Mrs. Grahame, and a crowd of friends and relations were waiting for her, re-shut the door, and was seen no more till the next morning.

Within ten minutes the bridal carriage had driven from the door amid the usual salutations. Mrs. Grahame drew back from the window, and said :

"I trust she will be happy, I'm sure ; but it's a great trial to lose her so soon—Boo-hoo!"

*Friendly chorus:* "Boo-hoo!"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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